# Classical Greek Tactics

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# Classical Greek Tactics

## *A Cultural History*

*By*

Roel Konijnendijk

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# Acknowledgements

At the age of about seventeen, as an undergraduate student at Leiden University, I began to wonder what it was the Greeks actually did in war. After that, things may have gotten slightly out of hand.

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# Notes on Style

This book is about seeing Greek tactics in context. It is difficult to write on this topic in English—or any other modern language for that matter—without courting anachronism and obfuscating the point. An account that speaks of 'soldiers' and 'battalions' conjures an image of standing institutions and uniformed professionals that has no bearing on the practices of the Greeks. I have tried as much as possible to avoid such misleading terms. However, in the context of a modern argument, any attempt to write about the Greeks in something resembling their own words is of course fated to fall short. On the one hand, it is easy enough to steer clear of modern equivalent names for ancient ranks and units, but on the other hand, an effort to avoid essential terms like 'officer' or 'infantry' would lead to strange contortions that distract from the argument. Besides, exactly which terms elicit anachronistic associations depends on the reader. Compromises are inevitable; no term is without its problems. In some places I have resorted to simply transliterating the Greek, in the hope that this will not appear facile or pedantic.

In what follows, all dates cited are BC unless they refer to modern scholarship. All translations of Greek are by the author, usually adapted from those of the Loeb Classical Library. All passages from modern scholarship in languages other than English have been translated by the author. In the transliteration of Greek names, I have been, to borrow a phrase from G.B. Grundy, 'consistently inconsistent'. I have tried to stick to Hellenised spelling as much as possible (hence 'Lakedaimonians', 'Sokrates', 'Delion'), but yielded to Latinised forms in cases where the Greek now sounds very strange (such as 'Thucydides' and 'Plutarch'). Stubbornly, I have followed this convention in my references to ancient literary sources as well, giving the names of authors and their works in a transliteration of the original Greek wherever possible. My notes will refer, for instance, to 'Ain. Takt.' for Aineias Taktikos, rather than Aeneas Tacticus; they will cite 'Xen. *Lak. Pol.*' for the *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, rather than the *Respublica Lacedaemoniorum*. The purpose of this has been to strip away unnecessary Latin and Latinisation, and get that tiny bit closer to the Greeks themselves.

# Introduction

After the disastrous battle of Leuktra, little remained of the Spartans' supreme power. The former hegemonic overlords of Greece were confined to their corner of the Peloponnese, hemmed in by bitter rivals, plagued by a critical shortage of men and money. Still they kept on fighting. Around 366, the Athenian orator Isokrates wrote down how he imagined their prince Archidamos might advise them to wage their war against the world:

> καὶ τί ἂν εὐξαίμεθα μᾶλλον ἢ λαβεῖν πλησιάζοντας καὶ παρατεταγμένους καὶ περὶ τὰς αὐτὰς δυσχωρίας ἡμῖν ἀντιστρατοπεδεύοντας ἀνθρώπους ἀτάκτους καὶ μιγάδας καὶ πολλοῖς ἄρχουσι χρωμένους; οὐδὲν γὰρ ἂν πολλῆς πραγματείας δεήσειεν, ἀλλὰ ταχέως ἂν αὐτοὺς ἐξαναγκάσαιμεν ἐν τοῖς ἡμετέροις καιροῖς ἀλλὰ μὴ τοῖς αὐτῶν ποιήσασθαι τοὺς κινδύνους.
>
> And what better thing could we wish for than to catch them near us, drawn up for battle together and encamped face to face with us on the same difficult ground—a disorderly and mixed-up crowd, following many leaders? For it would not require great effort, but we would quickly force them to risk battle at a moment that suits us and not them.
>
> ISOK. 6.80

These words go against all conventional wisdom on the nature of Greek battle. Until recently, it was universally held that the Greek ideal was for battle to be an 'agonal', game-like, ritualised affair. Wars were decided by well-ordered masses of heavily armoured men marching down to a level plain at a prearranged time to determine who was the stronger. Isokrates defies this notion in detail. He draws his imagined Spartan audience a picture of a confused and ill-disciplined mob of enemies, drawn into rugged, unfavourable ground, surprised and overwhelmed, easily thrown into panic and routed. That, he says, is how they should defeat the rest of Greece: not by engaging their rivals in a fair and open battle, but by seizing every advantage, preying on enemies who are weak and disorganised, and giving them no chance to prepare for the fight.

Passages like these have typically been reconciled with the image of limited battle by positing a radical change in military thought and practice somewhere in the course of the Classical period, either provoked by the protracted Peloponnesian War or emerging gradually in the course of the fourth century. In this view, Isokrates' claims exemplify the brutal, cynical way of war that supplanted traditional Greek ideals and customs. Yet, all through the historical

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accounts and military treatises of the period, we consistently find the same focus on securing advantage, the same hope to catch the enemy by surprise, the same negative assessment of the abilities of cumbersome coalition armies composed of amateur warriors. There is no other system of tactical thought. Isokrates does not express an amoral extreme; his words epitomise the principles of Classical Greek approaches to pitched battle.

To compile a new characterisation of these approaches to battle is the purpose of this book. Its subject is tactics and tactical thought—defined here as the choices made by Greeks regarding battle, and the ideals and motivations behind those choices. It seeks to answer basic questions about a culture's way to fight: what options did commanders have when they went into battle? What conditions and principles limited those options? What were their aims and intentions when they engaged the enemy? In other words, what did they think was acceptable and achievable in battle?

An answer to such questions would fill a niche in recent scholarship. Older works have tended to focus on the moral, social and economic factors that limited Greek warfare to the open engagement of rival formations of citizen hoplites. The consequence of these restrictive factors was that Greek tactical ingenuity was deliberately stunted—characterised by limited development and limited goals. For several centuries, pitched battles played out according to the same predictable sequence. A growing body of revisionist studies has appeared over the last few decades that has called every aspect of this traditional view into question. These studies have made the case that, from the earliest times, there were few tacit rules limiting Greek behaviour in battle and war, and that the object of their campaigns could be the wholesale destruction of the enemy. Such conclusions invite a review of the notion of battle as a ritual affair. They suggest that the element that has long been considered central to the Greek way of war—pitched battle—may actually have been the subject of considerable thought and experimentation from an early age. It would seem that the stakes were higher, the options broader, and the moral compunctions fewer than we have assumed. Did the Greeks even *wish* to fight agonal, rule-bound battles, or were their ideals of a different kind? Even a synthesis of current insights on Greek tactics would contribute to the emerging paradigm—but as we will see, many arguments may be pushed further, and many aspects integrated more closely, than scholars have done to date. A new model of battle tactics should give us a better sense of the nature and development of those tactics. It should also give us a better understanding of their relation to Greek culture as a whole.

This intention to reconsider the *context* of Greek tactics is one reason behind the work's subtitle, 'a cultural history'. As I will show in the first chapter, the traditional model of hoplite battle began as a theory that cared little about historicising tactics, driven as it was by a narrative about the gradual discovery of the universal principles of war. Later studies have tried to correct this, explaining in detail the structural factors that made Greek warfare what it was, and rooting tactics firmly in a distinct socio-cultural context. However, in doing so, they reinforced a model that was itself largely detached from that context. Both the model and its supposed structural background have come in for sustained criticism in recent works. I will argue that the peculiar perspective of the traditional model of hoplite battle has caused its proponents to privilege a particular range of ancient material at the expense of much else, with enduring consequences for our perception of the Greek way of war. Contrary evidence was found, acknowledged, even described in detail, but it was denied its consequences—not out of stupidity or sloth, but out of a conscious or unconscious desire to justify and contribute to an inherited system of beliefs about what Greek tactics were like. As the revisionists have shown, a different perspective on the sources may lead us to radically different conclusions. The distorting effect of this traditional model is the first of two strands that tie together the chapters that follow.

In the second chapter, I will lay the foundations of the perspective taken here, which will be the second strand running through the rest of the work. I will argue that one of the rarely remarked but critical shortcomings of the traditional model of hoplite battle has been its underappreciation of an aspect of Greek culture that did more to limit the abilities of armies in battle than any tacit moral rule. Simply put, the Greeks refused to train for war; their deliberate amateurism directly influenced the options and decisions of every commander who led them in the field. Greek tactical thought was shaped by the consequences of the untrained hoplite. His lack of organisation and skill and his aversion to military discipline critically weakened the control of generals over their troops and the options at their disposal to overcome tactical challenges. Any analysis of Greek approaches to battle must start from this point. A Greek militia could not be asked to do what it was never trained or accustomed to do.

This unusual condition of military practice is the other reason why this study is titled a cultural history of tactics. It does not examine in detail the institutions or ideologies that facilitated and shaped war and that favoured particular tactics; such work has been the great achievement of much revisionist scholarship in recent years. Rather, the present work attempts to study Classical Greek tactics and tactical thought *as culture*—that is, as a distinct system of beliefs and practices that arose from its specific historical environment and could only develop on its own terms. This is not just a matter of acknowledging its peculiar features. It is also about recognising that Greek generals did not operate in an environment of practical or intellectual freedom, where all forms of action and innovation were theoretically possible. Rather, they worked with the tools they had, to tackle the specific problems they faced. An effort, wherever possible, to see their decisions *only* within this contemporary military context informs my account of the nature and development of Greek approaches to battle.

The Classical Greek historians reveal aspects of tactical thought whenever they describe any part of a battle or battle plan. Sometimes they comment explicitly on tactics; at other times, their unadorned treatment speaks volumes about what they considered normal and acceptable. Other sources, too, feature tactical thought in one form or another, and I have tried to use as wide a range as possible of literary material where it provides useful insights. On the subject of such thought, however, no source could be more valuable than the military treatises that begin to appear for the first time during the fourth century: Xenophon's essays on cavalry command and Spartan customs, his *Kyroupaideia*, and the sole surviving work of Aineias the Tactician. These works reveal the process of abstracting tactical practice into tactical thought. They represent the first forays into military theory. Wherever possible, I will discuss their advice, and consider whether they confirm or subvert the picture of military practice we find elsewhere.

After the two introductory chapters, the rest of the work will follow a more obvious thematic sequence, taking the reader through the successive stages of pitched battle. The third chapter deals with the time and place of battle; the fourth, with army composition and deployment; the fifth, with command and battle tactics; the sixth, with the rout, the pursuit, and the peculiar rituals that concluded battle in the Classical period. Within each of these thematic chapters, the essential questions are the same. What were the options available to Greek commanders, and how do the sources assess their decisions? Did the range of options change, and if so, how and why?

Many forms of Greek battle lie outside the range of this study. The constraints of my theme have largely forced out discussion of the assault and defence of fortresses and settlements. I can say little with confidence about naval warfare, except to observe that remarkably similar principles and developments seem to have applied to warfare on land and at sea alike. Despite the many guises of Classical Greek land warfare, my work is focused primarily on pitched battle and the thoughts and values that shaped it. This choice is in part due to the relevance of major battles—tactical thought is revealed in greatest detail in surviving accounts of such engagements—and in part precisely because it has been of such interest to previous scholars.

In pitched battle, then, it seems the Greeks did not intend to win a symbolic victory in a fair contest of hoplites, but to destroy the enemy in a ruthless display of military power. The question was how this destruction could be achieved at minimal risk to the militia army that city-states relied on to fight their battles. This was the context of Greek tactical thought and practice—and it helps us to understand the intricacies of a tactical system which may occasionally have seemed limited, even primitive, but which aimed for victory by any available means, and nothing less.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Prussian Model of Hoplite Battle

## The Traditional View of Tactics

The origins of the traditional characterisation of Classical Greek approaches to battle are distant and peculiar. They are also under-researched. Despite a flurry of recent historiographical studies on Greek warfare,[1] the oldest standard works in the field have never been the subject of detailed inquiry. Yet their influence continues to be felt. The model of Greek tactics that was formulated by German scholars in the mid-nineteenth century has grown with the study of ancient history as a whole, taking on ever greater significance as it was tied to economic, cultural and political changes, until its ideological descendant became the heart of a holistic theory of Greek history that saw tactical thought as one of the most important expressions of the culture and values of the Greeks.

The purpose of this chapter is, firstly, to give a brief outline of the scholarly tradition that has produced and refined the only existing model of Greek tactics. In the process, it will hopefully become clear how certain basic principles and ideas have taken on a life of their own, surviving in scholarship despite constant development of the way Greek warfare has been analysed as a whole. Secondly, through the example of the battle of Leuktra, I will show how deeply the problems inherent in this traditional model have become embedded in the discipline. While the 'heretical' works of recent decades largely seem to have turned away from the old paradigm, they have not yet replaced it with a fresh characterisation, since tactics and tactical thought have rarely been their primary focus.[2] As a result, the assumptions of the traditional model persist. Any new analysis of Greek approaches to battle will have to start from the beginning.

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[1] Hanson 1999; 2007; Dayton 2005, 7–29; Wheeler 2007b; Bettalli 2011; Kagan/Viggiano 2013c.

[2] The only 'heretical' scholar who has written specifically about tactics and tactical thought is Echeverría (2011). However, useful points have also been made in Rawlings 2007, 63–101, and Sheldon 2012. In addition, several studies have sought to establish a middle ground between traditional and revisionist schools of thought: see Lendon 2005; Wheeler 2007c; Matthew 2009; 2012; Bardunias/Ray 2016.

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### *The Prussians*

Like most aspects of the ancient world, the serious academic study of Greek military history, including the critical philological treatment of the texts as well as the systematic analysis of the evidence, began with a group of German scholars writing from the middle of the nineteenth to the early twentieth century.[3] They provided the foundation upon which all later scholarship, consciously or unconsciously, was built.[4]

In what follows I will refer to this group collectively as 'the Prussians'. This designation is not strictly accurate; while many of them were born in Prussia, most of their writings were published in the days of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. But the word has appropriate connotations. For the purposes of this study it cannot be overemphasised that these authors were men of considerable military education and experience.[5] Both Wilhelm Rüstow and Georg Veith were retired high-ranking army officers. Hans Delbrück, veteran of the Franco-Prussian War and author of a three-volume history of 'the art of war', was the personal tutor of a Prussian prince. Edmund Lammert, too, was drafted for the Franco-Prussian War; Hans Droysen volunteered for it. This background deeply influenced their perspective on ancient history as well as their intentions in writing about it. Johannes Kromayer insisted it would be impossible for anyone to understand Greek warfare without thorough knowledge of both the source material and the actual business of war.[6] Rüstow and his associate Hermann Köchly explicitly meant for their work to be instructive not just to historians and philologists, but to soldiers most of all.[7]

Their military mindset is clearly reflected in their works. These authors understood Greek warfare primarily as one form, one expression, of the timeless realities of war. Casual analogies with Prussian practice abound.[8] They helped to visualise equipment and tactics, to provide comparative cases of specific battle plans and troop types, and to build arguments where information from the sources was lacking. Prussian military standards informed these scholars' reconstructions of anything from possible running distances in full gear to the course of entire campaigns. Delbrück's advice for the struggling student of the ancients was 'to study Clausewitz, again and again only Clausewitz, until he has understood Thucydides'.[9]

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[3] Rüstow/Köchly 1852; Droysen 1889; Bauer 1893; Lammert 1899; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 1928, 1931; Delbrück 1908. To these we may add Beloch; the second volume of his influential standard work *Griechische Geschichte* (1897) contains a summary of military developments that perfectly echoes Rüstow and Köchly's analysis.

[4] Hanson 1999, 379, 383.

[5] The notable exception is Adolf Bauer, an Austrian, who seems to have devoted his life to teaching history.

[6] Kromayer/Veith 1928, 16. The four-volume collection on ancient battlefields he compiled with Veith (1903–1931) was dedicated to Count von Schlieffen.

[7] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, iii–iv, ix.

[8] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 9, 14, 21, 27, 44, 102, 108, 113, 131, 134, 150, 152, 163; Lammert 1899, 4, 6 n. 1, 9 n. 7, 12, 13 n. 1; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 11, 60–61, 68, 71, 77, 81, 317–318, 326–328; Delbrück 1908, 10, 37, 52–55, 65–69, 74; Kromayer/Veith 1931, 212–215.

Land battles and battle tactics were these authors' main interest. Several of them openly admitted they were ignorant of naval affairs, and had consequently ignored the subject. Chapters on siege warfare—if any were offered—served chiefly to stress how little the Greeks understood of it. Of all these scholars, only Rüstow and Köchly delved into the earliest origins of warfare in Greece and its connection to the development of state and society.[10] Through these deliberate choices, they ruthlessly cut down the subject of Greek warfare to the elements they regarded as worthy of record. Presented in seemingly immutable order, these were weaponry, troop types, unit drill, and tactical developments.

Inevitably, their interpretation of these elements was shaped by their professional military focus. They based their assumptions on file width and marching formations on their own army experience. Several of them insisted on describing in exhaustive detail what is known of Greek unit drill and formation evolutions.[11] Even though they could not establish any clear connection between the various forms of drill and the way Greek battles were actually fought, they still took formation drill to be of crucial importance—so much so that several of them took the existence of such training in cities other than Sparta for granted, despite the complete absence of evidence.[12] They seem to have been unwilling or unable to imagine a form of warfare so primitive as to lack this feature, regardless of what the sources may have implied. The Prussians were aware that the depth of the phalanx differed according to circumstance, but Rüstow and Köchly asserted that it must have had a standard depth of eight ranks; after all, the execution of formation evolutions demanded it. All known alternative depths were therefore dismissed.[13] Delbrück protested that the standard of eight ranks was 'arbitrary'—no such standard was ever established by the Greeks—but even he conceded in the end that eight ranks must have been the norm.[14]

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[9] Delbrück 1908, 116. The question whether any of these analogies were valid was in fact only ever raised by Delbrück—probably due to his intention, unlike the others, to write a history 'in the spirit of Leopold Ranke': 1908, xiv, 48–49, 96, 161. Wheeler (2007b, xxvi) saw Delbrück as 'the first historian to apply the principles of historicism to military history'.

[10] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 5–56, 72–103.

[11] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 104–117, 120–128, 183–189; Droysen 1889, 39–47, 49–54; Bauer 1893, 328–331; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 20–22; 1928, 79–82.

[12] The burden of evidence was explicitly flouted by Rüstow and Köchly (1852, 127), who claimed that Spartan drill, 'as we may plainly assume', must have existed throughout Greece. Bauer (1893, 348–349), Lammert (1899, 11–13, 25) and Kromayer and Veith (1928, 79) agreed, though the notion was disputed by Droysen (1889, 36). For more on training, see Chapter 2 below.

These authors tended to describe ancient battles in the terms of the contemporary military academy—terms like 'battalion', 'defensive wing' and 'concentration of force'. In this way they demonstrated how the Greeks 'had already mastered all the fundamental concepts of waging war' as early as the battle of Marathon.[15] Yet the casual equation of ancient with modern practice did not always lead them to such optimistic conclusions. While all authors agreed that Greek light troops and horsemen proved highly effective against hoplites in several notable engagements, they still ultimately tended to dismiss the actions of these troops as 'of no meaning whatsoever' because the correct modern tactics for their use in open battle could not be discerned in the sources.[16] There was a clear desire to see the standards of then-current military theory reflected in the ancient world—nowhere more poignantly illustrated than in Rüstow and Köchly's attempt to reconstruct the textbook deployment of chariots and infantry in Homer.[17]

This was the basis on which the Prussians defined their concept of Greek warfare. Their military background was not an incidental personal circumstance; it permeated their every thought and theory. It could not fail to influence their view of the development of Classical Greek approaches to battle.

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[13] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 118–120; see also Droysen 1889, 91; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 29; 1931, 237 n. 1.

[14] Delbrück 1908, 31–32, 149. The subject of hoplite formation depth is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 below.

[15] Delbrück 1908, 77; see also Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 57–62, 126, 144, 160–161; Lammert 1899, 9; Kromayer/Veith 1931, 7.

[16] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 52–54, 93, 97, 128–135, 182; Droysen 1889, 94–97 ('ohne jede Bedeutung', 95); Bauer 1893, 327–328; Lammert 1899, 5–7; Delbrück 1908, 34–37, 71, 108–109, 138–141, 150–152; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 84, 87–92, 94; Beck 1931, 197.

[17] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 6. They also assumed (131–132) that formation drill must have existed for peltasts since their first appearance. On the subject of Homer, Lammert (1899, 1–2) went much further, suggesting that the epics display tactics of a sophistication that would have put Napoleon to shame.

In a rare case of general agreement, the authors all divided this development into three distinct phases. The first of these ran from the time of the Persian invasions down to the end of the Peloponnesian War. The Prussians believed the warfare of the Archaic period to be either beyond reconstruction, or to be of a different nature than that of the Classical age; either viewpoint excluded it from their studies of phalanx battle.[18] Neither did they regard the Peloponnesian War itself as a catalyst of tactical change. It taught the Greeks the beginnings of strategy and year-round campaigning, and it triggered an explosion in the use of specialist mercenaries, but it caused no alterations in the basic tactics of battle. It was just another part of the first phase.[19]

This period, then, was the age of 'the tactics of pure hoplite battle'.[20] It was envisioned as a time when little could interfere with the parallel deployment and advance of hoplite phalanxes. The Greeks fought only 'small wars of rivalry',[21] in which battles were tests of strength, not attempts at annihilation; the Prussians saw no evidence of combined arms tactics or pursuit.[22] There was no manoeuvre; light troops and cavalry played no part or cancelled each other out; the clash of hoplites decided the battle. In Lammert's view, Greek warfare was governed by 'single-mindedness, prejudice and templates'—egalitarian armies 'wrestled with each other like two athletes without any tricks or feints'.[23] Droysen and Delbrück appear to have chafed at this simplified overall picture, but they did not offer any alternative models.[24] All authors contributed to the construction of the 'template', the 'typical' hoplite battle: a step-by-step account of phalanx fighting, seen as the central feature of Greek war.[25]

This account is a peculiar creature. Several of the Prussians acknowledged that units within a phalanx had a reasonable degree of autonomy, that the deployment and depth of the phalanx could vary, and that generals must have made their battle plans in advance. They also acknowledged the importance of non-hoplite support troops, at least from the Peloponnesian War onward. However, in their descriptions of the typical battle, these caveats are nowhere to be found.[26] In their model, the phalanx was a single homogenous force. It fought alone. Its best troops were always deployed on the right. Both phalanxes drew to the right as they advanced; both right wings consequently outflanked and routed the troops stationed over against them. After this, the two victorious right wings turned to confront each other, and this second clash decided the outcome of the battle.

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[18] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 30–31, 45–56; Droysen 1889, 91; Delbrück 1908, 1–2; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 22.

[19] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 72, 76–80, 85; Droysen 1889, 74–75; Delbrück 1908, 121, 137.

[20] 'Die Schlachtentaktik (…) des reinen Hoplitenkampfes': Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 142.

[21] 'Kleinen Rivalitätskämpfen': Kromayer/Veith 1928, 85.

[22] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 80, 144–145; Droysen 1889, 93–94.

[23] Lammert 1899: 'Einseitigkeit, Vorurteil und Schablone' (21); 'sie rangen miteinander wie zwei Athleten ohne alle Listen und Finten' (11).

[24] Droysen 1889, 92 n. 1; Delbrück 1908, 107, 111–112, 117.

[25] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 143–145; Droysen 1889, 91–94; Bauer 1893, 326–328; Beloch 1897, 463; Lammert 1899, 20; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 70–72; Delbrück 1908, 107; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 84–85.

This final element of the model is a clear imposition on the sources. A second encounter of this kind is seen exclusively at the battle of Koroneia, an engagement Xenophon considered unique (*Hell.* 4.3.16). Yet the Prussians built their model of phalanx warfare on the notion that every single hoplite battle was resolved in this way.[27] Perhaps the only explanation for their claim is that the logic of their model demanded it; if the initial clash resulted in partial victories for both sides, it follows that some kind of continuation must have occurred in order to establish the real winner. This continuation was therefore assumed in spite of the ancients' actual accounts. In the process, the Prussians enshrined Pausanias' assertion (4.8.11) that the Spartans did not pursue routed enemies because they were afraid to lose the cohesion of their hoplite line; it gave a neat tactical rationale for the perceived Greek habit of allowing beaten enemies to flee. The rule was by necessity made to apply to all Greeks. Only a phalanx that maintained close order after the first encounter could win the day.

Why did the Prussians define Greek battle as such a restricted affair? Certainly we cannot accuse them of ignorance. The authors' astounding knowledge of the Greek literary evidence and their extensive reconstructions of actual battles did not lead them to reconsider their model, despite the fact that there is little in the sources to confirm it. Neither did the model arise out of respect for some idealised Greek way of war; Delbrück stressed not only that their tactics had glaring weaknesses, but that the Greeks themselves were aware of those weaknesses.[28] Pupils of Clausewitz could hardly be brought to admire a form of warfare in which neither side appeared willing or able to annihilate the other. I would suggest instead that the Prussians *intended* to reduce

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[26] Compare Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 142–143 and 178–179; see also Droysen 1889, 92 n. 1; Lammert 1899, 9, 18–20; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 83–84, 86, 90.

[27] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 178–179; Droysen 1889, 93; Delbrück 1908, 107; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 84–85.

[28] Delbrück 1908, 107; for further criticism of hoplite warfare, see Droysen 1889, 101; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 11; 1928, 94.

Greek warfare to a minimum set of standard forms, a model that appeared to accommodate all the evidence, even if it matched none. This benchmark model was necessary to illuminate the impact of two great revolutions—the second and third phase in the development of hoplite tactics.

The second phase was marked by the Ten Thousand's return to Greece. The story of this mercenary army is packed with innovations; it shows a hoplite phalanx subdivided into small, flexible units, supplemented by missile troops and horsemen, together forming a combined-arms force responding to its desperate situation with an apparently unprecedented readiness to depart from tradition. The Prussians credited Xenophon with the invention of supporting flank guards for the phalanx, tactical mobility, reserve units, even 'manipular tactics'—all the elements of the later Macedonian and Roman ways of war. These new methods embodied a potential overthrow of the old ways of hoplite armies in battle. Yet they did not catch on in Greece. The Prussians believed the reason was simple: these irregular tactics would have been ineffective against an advancing phalanx. They had no place in wars of Greek against Greek.[29]

In their view, the real problem holding back the development of Greek warfare was the fact that there was no satisfactory way to subvert the template of phalanx battle. Since phalanx battle was Greek warfare's central truth, Xenophon's tactics, however brilliant, altered nothing. Greek approaches to pitched battle remained essentially unaltered for most of the Classical period. When change finally came, this marked the beginning of the third phase—the final stage of development, the tactical revolution. Its champion was Epameinondas. To him we will return.

### *The English*

The works of the Prussians were soon supplemented by a small set of seminal studies published in Britain. The foundation of these studies clearly lay in the scholarship described above. Rather than formulate their own interpretation of Greek tactics, they appear to have taken the model presented by the Prussians for granted, focusing their efforts on *explaining* the peculiarities of hoplite battle that earlier scholars had identified. The supposed 'paradox' of Greek warfare was put into words for the first time: how did a restricted, heavy-infantry-based form of fighting come to define warfare in a country as ill-suited for it as Greece?[30]

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[29] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 154–158; Beloch 1897, 463–464; Droysen 1889, 47–48; Delbrück 1908, 138–139.

[30] Grundy 1911, 242–246; Gomme 1950, 10; Adcock 1957, 6–7.

The key figure of this scholarship was G.B. Grundy. He adopted the Prussians' template of phalanx battle wholesale. In his view, even the most deviant battles were actually examples of the common type. Only hoplites counted; the best of these were always on the right; tactics amounted to nothing more than marching forth and breaking through. Wars were 'short and sharp' and fought only by the citizen militia. Light troops and cavalry were utterly irrelevant at least until the Peloponnesian War, and even then they struggled to have any impact on open battle.[31]

The great value of Grundy's work is in the structural reasons he offered for this model of limited war. Modern readers might not put much stock by his belief that Greeks were racially predisposed to hoplite warfare,[32] but many of his other suggestions have since become a staple of the discipline. As V.D. Hanson rightly stressed, 'knowledge from (…) Grundy is incorporated into contemporary scholarship far more than is formally cited.'[33]

Grundy's argument rested first of all on technology. Hoplite equipment, he noted, was extremely heavy; therefore the fully equipped hoplite was practically immobile. The burden of his equipment reduced his field of operations exclusively to open plains and his tactics exclusively to frontal assaults. Grundy believed hoplites were entirely unsuited for manoeuvre or sieges. Their effectiveness lay in fighting together in large, tight formations, bringing their sheer size and mass to bear. With Lammert, he argued that the hoplite was 'absolutely dependent' on the phalanx to function. To the Prussian model of battle, he added the most influential interpretation of the way hoplite combat worked: it is from him that we have inherited the image of phalanx fighting as 'a scrummage at the Rugby game of football'.[34]

The weaknesses of Grundy's cumbersome hoplite are obvious: he is vulnerable to attacks by more mobile troops able to fight at range, and he cannot overcome fortifications. Moreover, the rugged landscape of Greece seems to invite precisely these two forms of warfare. It puzzled Grundy that Greek light infantry and cavalry nevertheless appeared to be either ineffective or non-existent, and that the Greeks continued to display only the most basic grasp of siegecraft. Their perceived inadequacy in these areas prompted Grundy to describe Greek warfare as 'one of the most paradoxical phenomena in history'.[35] How could simple hoplite battle so dominate warfare when better alternatives existed?

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[31] Grundy 1911, 253, 257, 267–276.

[32] Grundy 1911, 259–262. To Grundy (4–7), all of Greek history was a story of 'racial decay'; the 'superior race' failed to take its 'racial responsibilities' when it left its great civilising mission to Philip and Alexander.

[33] Hanson 2007, 8 n. 7. The influence of Grundy is very apparent in Hanson's own work, but also appears to be the all but exclusive origin of the view of Greek warfare of such scholars as Cartledge (1977, 18, 21–23), Holladay (1982, 97), Osborne (1987, 13, 141–150), and Mitchell (1996, 89–96), to name just a few examples.

[34] Grundy 1911, 244, 267–269, 273, 290; see also Gomme 1950, 10. Lammert (1899, 12) already hinted at a similar view when he referred to the phalanx as a 'human power drill'. The rugby analogy persists in modern scholarship despite Fraser 1942, 15–16.

His answer had the great merit of placing military practices within a socio-economic context, rather than treating them exclusively as martial phenomena.[36] Greek campaigns, he argued, were aimed against enemy farmland; no community could afford to have its farmland devastated. Therefore, when its territory was invaded, a city-state would call out its hoplites to act as a literal human wall. They could only fight on plains, but only the plains mattered; as a line from mountain to mountain, they could not be outflanked, and from the front their closed phalanx was indestructible. It was the best possible defence the Greeks could devise.[37] A.W. Gomme added the frequently rehearsed argument that the obvious alternative strategy of guarding the passes leading *into* the plains was not available to the Greeks; they had neither the money to support permanent garrisons nor the desire to arm and train poorer citizens for the purpose.[38]

But was his question fundamentally the right one to ask? Arguments against the characterisation of Greek warfare as a straightforward matter of hoplite phalanxes can easily be deduced from his work. Like the Prussians, Grundy acknowledged that light troops were repeatedly used to devastating effect against hoplites. He also pointed out the impact of well-handled horsemen, and argued that cavalry should ultimately be able to defeat *any* force of infantry not equipped with firearms. On the subject of battlefield manoeuvre, he noted the hoplites' preoccupation with outflanking, 'the great theory of Greek tactics throughout the [fifth] century'—an observation that flew in the face of his own contention that these warriors were practically incapable of manoeuvre.[39] He believed that, despite their cost, mercenaries quickly rose to prominence during the Peloponnesian War, offering city-states the possibility of waging prolonged campaigns with specialist troops.[40] H.W. Parke's ground-breaking work on mercenaries, written a few decades later, stressed that the profession was actually 'of immemorial antiquity' in Greece, and only saw a brief decline in the fifth century.[41] Their ubiquity suggests that little stood in the way of Greek city-states fighting far less restricted battles and wars than the hoplite engagements that supposedly epitomised their military methods.

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[35] Grundy 1911, 242. Some scholars remain preoccupied with the 'paradox' of Greek warfare; see for instance Moggi 2002, 206; Bouvier 2006, 29–32.

[36] This is likely to be the result of his general intention to discuss 'the economic conditions under which men lived' (Grundy 1911, v); a substantial part of the book is entirely devoted to economic history.

[37] Grundy 1911, 246–249, 253, 255.

[38] Gomme 1950, 12–15; see also Anderson 1970, 3–5; Cartledge 1977, 22, 24; Holladay 1982, 98–99; Krentz 2007, 167. The theory of the passes tends to be treated as a running controversy, but it seems that despite Xenophon's endorsement (*Mem.* 3.5.25–27) only De Ste. Croix (1972, 190–195) has ever made the case in favour. The most balanced assessment is Hanson 1998, 88–102.

With these points in mind, it seems fair to suggest that the paradox Grundy grappled with was to a large extent the product of his own decision to follow the Prussians in their characterisation of Greek tactics. His work was an inspired effort to provide a context for a model that was itself based on a deliberately selective interpretation of the sources. Like the Prussians, he was happy to fill in gaps in the ancient evidence with examples from nineteenth-century military practice.[42] Again like the Prussians, he was keen to explain away material that did not fit the model. For example, he followed his account of the devastating potential of cavalry with the argument that the Classical Greeks simply did not have the money to raise such troops in meaningful numbers—despite the thousands already reported by Herodotos and Thucydides.[43] To explain why the Greeks were obsessed with outflanking despite the supposed simplicity of hoplite tactics, he suggested that the Greeks always *feared* a flank attack, but would never attempt to *launch* one, unwilling to risk exposing their own flank in the process.[44] But if all Greeks shared this way of thinking, why would they fear being taken in flank? Grundy did not resolve this, apparently content to have deflected a possible criticism of the notion of simple hoplite battle.

It is not clear why Grundy followed the professionally informed Prussian interpretation so closely. Part of the answer may lie in a shared sense of which sources to privilege over others; certain categorical statements by ancient authors have long been taken as fundamental truths despite an abundance of contrary evidence, as we will see in Chapter 3 below. Another part may be his insistence on the invincibility and world-conquering potential of the hoplite.

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[39] Grundy 1911, 266, 270, 272, 276–280.

[40] Grundy 1911, 258–259, 264 (echoing Droysen 1889, 74–75, and Delbrück 1908, 137).

[41] Parke 1933, 3–23.

[42] Grundy 1911, 268, 273, 278–279.

[43] Grundy 1911, 278–280; see Hdt. 5.63.3, 7.158.4; Thuc. 2.13.8, 4.93.3, 6.67.2.

[44] Grundy 1911, 271.

Belief in the tactical supremacy of this warrior type demanded a characterisation of Greek warfare in which it took pride of place.[45] However this may be, his solution to the paradox he formulated should be regarded as an elaborate justification for a preconceived idea. It served to explain, not the ancient evidence, but the Prussian template of limited hoplite battle. Grundy's only major deviation from their model was in its chronology: where the Prussians argued that Greek approaches to battle were left essentially unaltered by the Peloponnesian War, Grundy tended to ascribe all variations on the tactical template to the escalating effect of this drawn-out conflict.[46]

After the Second World War, the prevailing views on the development of Greek tactics were effectively summarised by Oxford scholar and Royal Navy intelligence officer F.E. Adcock in a short work titled *The Greek and Macedonian Art of War*. This work stood out at the time as the most convenient and accessible introduction to its subject that had yet appeared in English. As a printed collection of lectures, it may have provided little scope for the exploration of new ideas, but even so, its loyalty to the views and methods of earlier scholars is striking. There can be no doubt that it contributed greatly to their spread across the English-speaking world.

Adcock echoed every aspect of the conceptualisation of Greek tactics found in the Prussians. His belief in the primitivism and ritualised nature of Greek military methods is apparent in his description of 'the simple days of the hoplite phalanx,' when a typical campaign was 'a walking tour ending in a combat'.[47] Greek warfare was again declared to be the domain of hoplites, fighting fair and open battles on level ground, pressed to defend their farmland in a ritualised 'mass duel'. The decision of this clash was seen as final, obviating the need for prolonged pursuit.[48] Adcock considered missile troops 'as lightweight as their weapons'; he conceded that cavalry could have some limited effect in the right circumstances, but denied that they had the ability to play a decisive role in pitched battle.[49] Like several of the Prussians, he stressed the limitations of phalanx tactics that were the result of its members' lack of training; hoplites crashed together in masses eight ranks deep, without plans, manoeuvres, or reserves, until Epameinondas appeared on the scene.[50] Adcock also joined his

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[45] Grundy 1911, 7, 255.

[46] Compare Grundy 1911, 259, 272, 274, 276; Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 142; Delbrück 1908, 121.

[47] Adcock 1957, 82.

[48] Adcock 1957, 7, 9–10, 14, 41, 78–79.

[49] Adcock 1957, 11, 15–16, 48–51.

[50] Adcock 1957, 7, 9–10, 14, 25, 41, 76–79, 89. For hoplite amateurism, see Droysen 1889, 36–37; Delbrück 1908, 107.

German predecessors in their denial of the existence of surprise and ambush in Greek approaches to battle. He showed the same tendency to downplay evidence that ran contrary to the model; for example, he listed evidence of major cavalry victories only to conclude that cavalry saw 'few important successes'.[51] Finally, his work included another corpus of analogies with more modern military practice, in this case primarily drawn from the deeds of such British leaders as Nelson and Wellington.[52]

Due to the great influence of these works, despite Parke's effort to flesh out a particular aspect of Greek warfare that seemed to go against the Prussian model of hoplite-dominated decisive battle, it was the model that ended up in the textbooks.[53] This model was now substantially reinforced by Grundy's theory as to why this form of fighting dominated Classical Greek warfare, and by Gomme's rejection of the most obvious alternative way of war. All advances in strategy were still fixed onto the Peloponnesian War; battle tactics, however, were still taken to be in deadlock until finally Epameinondas changed the rules.

### *The Americans*

From the 1960s and 1970s onwards, when leading French historians turned primarily to the social and religious aspects of Greek warfare,[54] the baton of purely military history was picked up by a set of highly influential American scholars. These men have defined the modern features of the field. Their works were—and still are—applauded for their insight, erudition and accessibility. They continue to be the default reference works on the nature and development of Greek military theory and tactics.[55] It was not until the early years of the new millennium that their theories were seriously challenged.

The key scholar in the transition from British to American thought on Greek approaches to battle was J.K. Anderson—a Scot, born in India and educated at Oxford, who lived and worked for nearly sixty years at the University of California, Berkeley. When his work on fourth-century tactics and tactical thought was published in 1970, it did much to revive the study of this particular field, both in the United States and elsewhere. Like Adcock and the Prussians, Anderson had considerable military experience; he served as an intelligence officer in the Royal Highland Regiment during the Second World War. It may have been his wartime service that awakened his interest in the military methods of the Classical Greeks. It may also have been the formative role of his years in the armed forces that led him to produce a work on Greek tactics that was, in many ways, more 'Prussian' than the Prussians. Far from challenging their model of restricted and primitive war, Anderson consolidated it, using similar approaches to arrive at even more confidently stated conclusions. On the very first page of his book we find the two most pervasive ancient categorical statements on the limits supposedly upheld by the Greeks in war.[56] These passages set the tone for the rest of the work. The brief summary of Greek warfare that follows is based entirely on Grundy and Gomme: defending farmland was the primary concern of Greek armies, and so 'the troops were equipped to fight on this land, in large masses drawn up in close order, engaging hand-to-hand with spear and shield.'[57] For all his acknowledgement of developments 'in the details', Anderson maintained that 'the essential principles'—hoplites fighting hoplites in monolithic masses on level ground—'remained the same' throughout the Archaic and Classical periods.[58] Where the Prussians had confessed that pitched battle was simply their own preferred subject, Anderson repeatedly declared that it was in fact the true purpose of the hoplite himself, at the expense of strategy, skirmish and siege.[59] He wrote at length on the 'minor actions' fought between hoplites and light infantry, but concluded that, in the end, 'it was still by pitched battles that wars were won, and hoplites, not peltasts, won the pitched battles.'[60] Some of the Prussians may have had their doubts about the training and abilities of the phalanx, but Anderson followed Rüstow and Köchly in assuming that all hoplites 'were certainly drilled to handle their arms in unison' and 'must have been' drilled to fight in formation. He followed up these claims with another detailed study of Greek formation evolutions.[61] In sum, his adoption of the Prussian model allowed him to write a work on the 'military theory and practice' of the Greeks, of which the actual subject was only 'Spartan military techniques, the art of drilling hoplites and handling them on the battlefield, and the way in which their own skills were finally turned against the Spartans.'[62] The last of these, of course, was the achievement of Epameinondas.

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[51] Adcock 1957, 49.

[52] Adcock 1957, 7, 12, 34, 45, 52, 71, 83–92.

[53] The historiographical account of Kagan and Viggiano (2013c, 8–9), for example, suggests that these scholars received the Prussian model entirely through Grundy; they also stress the key role of Adcock (16–18).

[54] The defining works are Vernant 1968; Garlan 1972, 1989; Lonis 1979; Ducrey 1985.

[55] Anderson 1970; Pritchett 1971–1991; Hanson 1989, 1991a; Ober 1999.

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[56] Namely, Hdt. 7.9β.1 and Polyb. 13.3.2–8: see Anderson 1970, 1. For a more detailed discussion of the value of these passages, see Chapter 3 below.

[57] Anderson 1970, 7.

[58] Anderson 1970, 13.

[59] Compare Delbrück 1908, xiv; Anderson 1970, 6–9, 41–42, 111, 141.

[60] Anderson 1970, 110 ('minor actions'), 111–140 (on 'hoplites and other arms'), 42 ('hoplites won the pitched battles'). In his work on horsemanship, cavalry is similarly denied a decisive role in battle (Anderson 1961, 140).

[61] Anderson 1970, 91, 94–110.

W. Kendrick Pritchett, who saw Anderson's work as 'complementary' to his own,[63] made an invaluable contribution to the discipline by devoting decades to the task of compiling all the evidence related to Greek war. However, given the massive scale of this undertaking, it is not surprising that little room was left for him to confront existing interpretations. He may also have had some affinity with the outlook of the Prussians; his service in the Army Air Force during the Second World War did much to shape his later research interests. The result was that Pritchett's work, again, only consolidated the existing model. At times the artificiality of this model seems to have escaped him. For example, he listed all the known depths of the phalanx, and in the process revived Kromayer and Veith's comment that it should not be regarded as a monolithic force of fixed size—yet he still accepted Rüstow and Köchly's assertion that its standard depth was eight, without acknowledging that these authors had posited this standard depth for purely hypothetical reasons.[64]

By far the most successful of the American experts on Greek warfare, however, is Victor Davis Hanson. This scholar took the Prussian model, its Grundian justification, and prevailing notions about the rise of the hoplite in the early Archaic period,[65] and tied them into a grand theory that explained, not just the nature of Greek warfare, but that of Greek society and culture as a whole.[66] Hanson distilled from the long historiography of the subject an overall picture in which pitched battle, while brutal and bloody in itself, was rigidly restricted to the clash of tight phalanxes composed of heavily armed citizen-hoplites. There was little to no pursuit, combined arms warfare, or siege warfare—only the hoplite engagement in the plain. He repeated Grundy's concention that such battles were 'often identically replayed' because they were the best known way to resolve rivalries and border disputes between Greek states. They were short, simple, uniquely decisive battles fought on the only ground that mattered, which was also the only ground where hoplites were able to fight.[67] The supremacy of hoplites within this restricted form of warfare gave them the power to organise the societies that depended on their protection as they saw fit. They did this in ways that secured the interests of their peer group—the safety of their families and possessions, the inviolability of their lands, and the personal and political freedom of each individual citizen-hoplite. The result, according to Hanson, was a culture of stability and liberty sustained by an armed agrarian middle class. Its necessary corollary was the perpetuation of a way of war that consisted of nothing but decisive pitched battle between hoplites on level ground. In Hanson's view, the 'formal conventions' of Greek warfare—the product of the deliberate 'wonderful, absurd conspiracy' between the hoplite classes of the Greek city-states[68]—reduced it precisely and exclusively to the Prussian template of hoplite battle.[69]

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[62] Anderson 1970, 9.

[63] Pritchett 1971, 1.

[64] Pritchett 1971, 137–143; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 83–84, 86; Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 118.

[65] Proponents refer to this historiographical tradition collectively as the 'grand hoplite narrative': see Kagan/Viggiano 2013b, xv; Hanson 2013, 257.

[66] Kagan and Viggiano (2013c, 2–7) have noted that much of this theory was anticipated in the nineteenth century by George Grote. However, Hanson presented it with unprecedented cogency and thereby catapulted it into the limelight both within and outside of academia.

Josiah Ober brought this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion by establishing exactly what rules restricted the conduct of Greeks in war. With Hanson, he argued that these rules were imposed on Greek society to maintain 'the hoplite-dominated socio-military system,' rooting tactics and military thought firmly in the perceived societal structure. With Hanson, he claimed that it was not until the Peloponnesian War that all the rules came to be broken. As we have seen, this assumption has gradually become essential to the traditional view; since the warfare described by Thucydides plainly did not fit the old model, the only way to uphold that model was to declare that it held sway until the Peloponnesian War changed everything.[70]

As they developed their grand theory, however, these scholars seem to have lost sight of the peculiar origins of the Prussian model that lay at its heart. In Hanson's works, there is little to no acknowledgement of alternative forms of fighting, and no justification for the neglect of subjects like sieges or naval warfare. Until the time for which such things are attested, hoplite supremacy is assumed to have defined all wars. Hanson admits that these wars have left little trace in the sources, and that there is not a single known battle description matching what he believes to have been the standard expression of Greek military methods throughout the Archaic and early Classical periods.[71] The theory does not suffer from this lack of concrete evidence. Since it posits that the reasons behind limited war were economic, social and moral in nature, the omnipresence of the Prussian model of hoplite battle can be assumed; no other form of fighting would have emerged from the society and culture of ancient Greece.

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[67] Hanson 1989, xv, 5, 16, 25, 198; 1991b, 3–4; 2000, 203–222; 2013, 257–259.

[68] Hanson 1991b, 5–6.

[69] Hanson 1991b, 4–5; 2000, 203, 206–207.

[70] Ober 1999, 56, 66–70; Hanson 2000, 205, 212, 213. The notion of the Peloponnesian War as a catalyst has spread widely: see for example Cartledge 1977, 11; Vidal-Naquet 1986, 94; Wheeler 1983, 5; Hunt 1998, 53; Debidour 2002, 8–9, 62, 123, 197, 200; Boëldieu-Trevet 2007, 15–16; Mann 2013, 16.

As such, Hanson's grand narrative represents a complete reversal in the historical analysis of Greek tactics. The Prussian model was originally based on the extent to which its creators could see universal principles of warfare reflected in the sources. In their view, the limitations of the model were proof of the primitivism of the Greeks; the developments of the later Classical period were presented as the gradual emergence of good tactical sense. Grundy made a first attempt to place their model within a socio-economic and cultural context. Hanson, however, placed the context above the model. He ultimately seems to have held that, far from a paradox requiring explanation, the model was a natural consequence of the way Greek society was arranged; indeed, it was the *only* form of warfare that could have emerged from Greek culture as it developed in the early Archaic period. To Hanson, evidence of increasingly sophisticated military methods was a sign of the *decline* of the culture that had produced warfare according to the model. By his effort, the Prussians' universalistic image of Greek approaches to battle was transformed into one that seemed to proceed entirely from the cultural realities of the age it described.

Having thus placed the existing model on a seemingly unshakeable foundation, Hanson eventually fell into a great historiographical irony. In a survey of earlier scholarship, he noted the dissension among the Prussians over the veracity of their simple template, and their concern to present the evidence that did not support its rigid form. It seemed to him that they were needlessly trying to complicate the picture, and to stifle the visceral realities of Greek warfare with the cold analytical tools of the military academy. He therefore criticised them for their failure to fully embrace what was, at its heart, their own model: 'the very notion of a brief collision of uniformly armed equals—little tactics, little strategy, little generalship—must have disturbed these men, and so they did their best to reinvent Greek warfare into something that it was not.'[72]

Around the same time, however, alternative notions also began to appear. As the theories built around the model of limited hoplite battle became more ambitious and wide-ranging, doubts about these theories and about the initial characterisation of Greek tactics started to gather strength. In an article on hoplite combat published in 1989, George Cawkwell dubbed the prevailing interepretation of what the clash of phalanxes looked like 'orthodox' and its critics 'heretics';[73] these terms have since been adopted to describe, respectively, the defenders and revisionists of the entire traditional view of Greek warfare. The pioneer of a more comprehensive 'heresy' was Peter Krentz, another American and a close contemporary of Hanson. His seminal studies on strategy and deception in Greek warfare and his direct response to Ober's chapter on the supposed rules of war revealed the potential for a complete reimagining of the subject.[74] They showed how much has sometimes been dismissed in favour of how little, and how thoroughly this has distorted our view. Following in his footsteps, scholars like John Dayton, Louis Rawlings and Hans van Wees have used evidence that was consciously or unconsciously excluded from the Prussian model to challenge many of its central aspects.[75] Many of its shortcomings have come to light—its excessive focus on hoplites and pitched battle, its insistence on supposed agonal conventions, its neglect of pursuit and violence against non-combatants. The cultural and socio-economic justifications devised for the model by Grundy and others have drawn similar criticism.[76]

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[71] Hanson 1989, 37; 2000, 222; 2013, 267–269.

[72] Hanson 1991b, 10.

At the time of writing, Hanson's grand theory and other 'orthodox' views remain highly influential in popular history and non-specialist treatments of Greek warfare; aspects of the underlying Prussian model of hoplite battle still play a fundamental role in many academic studies.[77] It will be apparent in the footnotes of this book that many of the ideas of the Prussians continue to be echoed, sometimes verbatim, in recent scholarship. A conference held at Yale in 2008 to resolve the conflict between 'orthodox' and 'heretic' views—some related to the theories built on the Prussian model, others to the nature and origins of the hoplite—only resulted in both sides formulating their own position more sharply.[78] However, a number of recent summaries of Greek warfare have explicitly moved on from the Prussian paradigm, and it is no longer possible to write about the subject without acknowledging how much of it is contested by modern scholars.[79]

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[73] Cawkwell 1989, 375.

[74] Krentz 1997; 2000; 2002.

[75] Van Wees 2000b; 2004; 2011; Rawlings 2000; 2007; Dayton 2005; Krentz 2007; 2013; Echeverría 2011.

[76] Foxhall 1997; 2013; Van Wees 2001; 2013.

[77] Sidebottom (2004, 144) still referred his readers to Hanson's work for 'the commonly accepted view of hoplite battle'. For recent reassertions of (parts of) the Prussian model, see for instance Lendon 2005, 41–42; Hutchinson 2006, viii–ix; Cartledge 2009, 362; Lee 2009, 391–392; Buckler 2013, 663; Millender 2016, 165–167.

[78] Kagan/Viggiano 2013b, xvii; Ducrey 2015, 57.

The revisionist conclusions of recent academic works on the nature and origins of Greek warfare suggest that questions about battle tactics and tactical thinking also require new answers. But there is no detailed alternative model of Greek approaches to battle. Despite all the material that has now been given new emphasis or has first been treated in earnest, few authors have engaged directly with the professional Prussian interpretation of one of the most central elements of Greek war. Hanson's own comment from 1999 is still largely valid: 'after the appearance of the great handbooks of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there has been essentially nothing written on Greek tactical doctrine.'[80] Only Fernando Echeverría's ground-breaking article on 'cultural tactics', placing the apparent simplicity of Greek approaches to battle in the context of inexperienced militia armies motivated primarily by self-preservation, has pointed the way toward a new appraisal more in line with fresh perceptions of Greek warfare in general.[81] The consequence of the relative lack of scholarly attention for tactical thought and practice is that treatments of tactical concepts and ingenuity continue to be expressed as variations on the Prussian model. Scholars still often assume that Greek armies consisted almost entirely of hoplites, who marched into battle in a monolithic formation, eight ranks deep, with the general on the right. There is still a widespread belief that tactics rarely played a part in the outcome of their engagements, and that the Greeks fought for nothing more than possession of the battlefield itself. The brief analysis above has, I hope, made clear how fundamental and influential this model has been. Its enduring power to distort analyses of Greek military history is nowhere better demonstrated than in modern assessments of the figure of Epameinondas, and in the ongoing controversy over the nature of his victory at Leuktra.

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[79] Van Wees 2000c; 2004; Lee 2006; Rawlings 2007; 2013.

[80] Hanson 1999, 387. Indeed, no comprehensive study of Greek tactical thought has appeared since Anderson 1970; however, see more recently Rawlings 2007, 63–101; Wheeler 2007c; Echeverría 2011.

[81] Echeverría 2011.

## The Case of Leuktra

The Prussians, and all scholars who adopted their model of Greek approaches to battle, regarded Epameinondas as the key figure of Classical tactics. Fundamental to their perception of the evolution of Greek military methods was the idea that the course of pitched battles followed an immutable, ritualised sequence until this Theban commander unleashed his radical innovations on the unsuspecting Spartans at Leuktra in the summer of 371. His battle tactics ushered in a new age in the art of war.[82] Freed from the shackles described by the Prussian model, Greek warfare could finally attain the professionalism and sophistication that would eventually allow Alexander to conquer the Persian Empire.[83]

Epameinondas' role in the traditional narrative of Greek tactics is reflected in the language scholars have used to describe him. His victory at Leuktra won Epameinondas glory and fame in antiquity,[84] but modern scholars have been no less generous with their praise. Droysen, echoing Rüstow and Köchly, saw Epameinondas as the herald of 'a new age in battle tactics' representing 'the pinnacle of what could be achieved.' Bauer referred to him as 'the greatest tactician of the Greeks' and 'the instructor of the age to come'; Kromayer and Veith called him 'the first of the great military thinkers'. Similarly, Adcock saw in him 'the greatest tactical innovator that the Greek city-states ever produced'. J.F. Lazenby wrote of 'a general of genius', and N.G.L. Hammond quoted Anthony Snodgrass referring to him as 'the most masterly of all hoplite commanders'.[85] Anderson credited him with a 'revolution' in generalship; Cawkwell, too, noted a 'revolutionary change in the conception of warfare' brought about by 'the novel methods of genius'. Paul Cartledge called Leuktra a 'paradigm shift', a display of 'wise policy as well as brilliant generalship' in which Epameinondas 'outgeneralled Kleombrotos all along the line'. Even John

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[82] Tellingly, both Rüstow and Köchly (1852) and Kromayer and Veith (1928) subdivided their chapters on Classical 'Schlachtentaktik' (battle tactics) into the subheadings 'until Epameinondas' and 'Epameinondas'. The view of Leuktra as the dawn of a new age in tactics was repeated more recently by Chrissanthos (2008, 71).

[83] This theory found ostensible support in the fact that both Plutarch (*Pel.* 26.5) and Justin (7.5.2–3) attributed Philip II's military expertise to his education as a hostage in Thebes.

[84] Plut. *Pel.* 24.3–4, 29.2, 29.6; Diod. 15.52.7, 15.55.1, 15.56.3, 15.88.3; Cic. *De Or.* 3.139; *Tusc.* 1.4.

[85] Droysen 1889, 97–101; Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 142, 171–182; Bauer 1893, 411; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 57, 76–85, 165; 1928, 93–95, 155; Adcock 1957, 24; Lazenby 1985, 40; Hammond 1997, 357 n. 7.

Keegan counted Epameinondas an 'outstanding general'.[86] Few figures from ancient history have inspired such lasting admiration.

These appraisals seem to leave little room for controversy. Until the late 1980s, when Hanson published a more critical view of Leuktra,[87] the verdict on Epameinondas' brilliance and the impact of his methods was unanimous: Epameinondas perfected phalanx tactics and advanced the Greek way of war to its highest stage of development. But when the Prussians asked themselves *how* he had achieved his remarkable victory—what *exactly* his innovations were—their apparent consensus broke down. Despite their similar esteem for Epameinondas, Anglophone scholars of the second half of the twentieth century were just as hopelessly divided on the issue. In their ongoing argument over the specifics of the tactical revolution, these scholars revealed the weaknesses of the traditional view of Greek tactics. It is instructive, therefore, to consider this controversy in detail.

Of the battle itself, four separate accounts survive in the sources.[88] Each account has its particular shortcomings, but they offer enough detail to allow for a reconstruction of the events. At the most basic level, our understanding is that the Thebans massed their own hoplites fifty ranks deep on their left flank and used this block formation to attack the Spartan contingent of the opposing army head-on. The Spartan king Kleombrotos was killed and his army was routed, leaving four hundred Spartiates dead. But was this the whole story behind the Theban victory? What did Epameinondas do to earn his traditional status as the greatest tactician of the Classical period?

### *The Theories*

True to form, the Prussians deployed the terminology of the military academy to explain the nature of Epameinondas' innovations. They argued that his deep formation turned the traditional Greek 'parallel battle' of straight phalanxes into a 'battle of the flanks'; he divided his army into an offensive and a defensive wing, and concentrated his attack on a single point.[89] However, that was as far as their common opinion went. Even on the innovative value of the supposed

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[86] Anderson 1970, 205; Cawkwell 1972, 261, 263; Cartledge 1987, 239–240, 380; Keegan 2004, 258.

[87] Hanson 1988.

[88] Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9–15; Diod. 15.55–56; Plut. *Pel.* 23; Paus. 9.13.3–12.

[89] The technical terms used in this context are 'Parallelschlacht', 'Flankenschlacht', 'Offensivflügel' and 'Defensivflügel': see Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 179–180; Bauer 1893, 410–411; Beloch 1897, 464; Lammert 1899, 24–25; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 57; 1928, 94; 1931, 323; Adcock 1957, 89.

'battle of the flanks' they could not agree. The earlier writers asserted that it was simply the concentration of force on one wing that made Epameinondas' tactics unique, but Bauer and Delbrück pointed out in response that this concentration itself was not new: the Thebans had used a deep phalanx at Delion in 424, more than fifty years before Leuktra. The latter authors suggested instead that the position of the deep formation on the left was what made it revolutionary.[90] This theory was disputed in turn by Kromayer and Veith, who insisted that Epameinondas would have placed his best troops wherever the situation demanded it, which just happened to be on the left both at Leuktra and later at Mantineia. In their view, the real innovation was his intention to attack the enemy where they were weak and exposed, to break through the line with one wing, and to encircle and capture the entire enemy army.[91] Even though they agreed on the general characterisation of Epameinondas' methods, the Prussians failed to reach a consensus on exactly how they advanced Greek tactical thought and practice as a whole.

On every other aspect of the question, the Prussians' disagreement was complete. There was endless debate over which ancient account should be the basis of modern reconstructions. Despite their apparent loathing of Plutarch, Rüstow and Köchly attempted to synthesize his account with those of Xenophon and Diodoros. Droysen, for his part, favoured Plutarch altogether. His approach was rejected by Delbrück, who preferred to focus on Xenophon. Johann Wolter, contributing to Kromayer and Veith's compendium of ancient battles, advised caution in the use of Xenophon's supposedly apologetic pro-Spartan writings and forcefully dismissed Plutarch's version as 'factually impossible'. In his view, only Diodoros offered a sensible account of the battle plan.[92]

Since the ancient sources vary greatly in focus and content, it should be no surprise that the battle narratives resulting from these inquiries were vastly different, even if the bare essentials outlined above were generally accepted. Plutarch places great emphasis on the role of the elite Theban Sacred Band, yet it is not clear to anyone where exactly these troops were deployed, or where and how they went into action when the fighting began. Xenophon neglects to mention any of the Spartan manoeuvres reported by Plutarch, and fails to explain how the Thebans protected their flanks, leaving the battle looking like a crude frontal assault. Diodoros, meanwhile, introduces a Spartan crescent formation, a concept unknown to the Classical world. Only Xenophon speaks of horsemen; in their attempts to create a plausible picture, some of the Prussians argued that these horsemen fought in front of the phalanx, others that they covered the wings. Some believed in a direct assault by the Theban hoplites, others thought they were moving at an angle when they charged. Some took issue with the advance in echelon by which Epameinondas is said to have protected his weak right wing; they did not agree on whether untrained citizen hoplites would have been capable of such a manoeuvre, and wondered whether the words might simply refer to a 'leaning back' which the weaker flank of a phalanx would naturally be doing anyway.[93] After eighty years of German scholarship, none of these matters was resolved. Later writers had little respect for the efforts of their predecessors: Wolter mocked Delbrück for his tendency to hypothesize obstructive terrain features, and called Rüstow and Köchly's version a 'contamination'.[94] Yet it is doubtful whether his own account, relying mainly on the supposed weight of the Theban charge, would have convinced them in turn.

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[90] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 179–180; Droysen 1889, 97–100; Bauer 1893, 408–409; Delbrück 1908, 155–156 (for a similar view see Lammert 1899, 24–26).

[91] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 77–80.

[92] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, xv (on the worthlessness of Plutarch), 172–175; Droysen 1889, 97–100; Delbrück 1908, 156–157; Wolter 1931, 301–308.

Scholars of more recent times have been no more successful. A long list of alternative accounts has only increased the range of possibilities without bringing a consensus any closer. E.L. Wheeler has noted that Leuktra, 'along with Marathon, are the two most controversial battles of Classical Greek history'; Pritchett commented with a hint of exasperation that 'there are more reconstructions of Leuktra than of any other Greek battle, and the end is not in sight.'[95] When Anderson revived the debate on what happened at the battle, he did so in a fashion true to the earlier examples, by first explaining why he favoured one ancient account over the others—in his case, that of Plutarch—and then putting forth a reconstruction that has since been accepted by practically no one.[96]

Both trends persisted over the following decades. On the subject of sources, most authors agreed with Wolter and Anderson that Xenophon's 'one-sided apologia'[97] was of little value; Cartledge, Buckler, Lazenby and Tuplin found

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[93] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 59–60, 84–85; Delbrück 1908, 161; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 84–85, 94; 1931, 314; Lammert 1899, 1–2, 26–27.

[94] Wolter 1931, 308–311.

[95] Wheeler 2007b, lxiv; Pritchett 1985, 54 n. 159.

[96] Anderson 1970, 198–220. His suggested solution to the problem of the Sacred Band's role had been dismissed earlier by Delbrück (1908, 156–157) and Wolter (1931, 303–306) and was dismissed again by Buckler (1980, 77) and Devine (1983, 206–207).

[97] Hammond 1997, 359; see also Cawkwell 1972, 258.

Diodoros similarly useless,[98] but Hammond believed him to offer the more credible account.[99] Against these views, Devine and Hanson reasserted the importance of Xenophon, the only authority not writing hundreds of years after the event.[100] So we return to the beginning.

As for reconstructions, A.D. Fraser added to the existing multitude his interpretation of the deep Theban phalanx as a reserve behind the front line; this notion, although adopted by Cawkwell, was rejected in detail by Holladay, Lazenby, and Hanson.[101] Buckler and Lazenby suggested that the Spartans attempted a complicated countermarch to extend their right wing, but more recent publications by Cartledge, DeVoto and Hutchinson subscribe instead to the more conservative outward march in column presented by Anderson.[102] Devine and Hammond separately launched new interpretations based on hints in the sources that the Thebans used a wedge formation; the former envisioned a vast infantry wedge with the Sacred Band at the tip, while the latter suggested that the entire Theban army advanced in column at an angle across the battlefield, colliding with the Spartans like a spear thrust only six files wide.[103] Yet this reading of the Greek in Xenophon was already decisively dismissed earlier by Bauer and Buckler.[104] Again, no other authors appear to have embraced these theories. Despite Delbrück's and Wolter's assertion that the deployment of cavalry in front of the phalanx at Leuktra was nothing new, several recent authors have argued that it was highly unusual; Cawkwell, Cartledge and Buckler even saw it as the earliest example of the tactical coordination of infantry and horsemen in Greek history.[105] Hanson disagreed, pointing to the evidence of the battle of Delion, as Delbrück had done before. I.G. Spence, in his work on the effectiveness of cavalry in Greek warfare, also seems to have sided with the Prussians on this aspect of the battle.[106] Lazenby questioned Plutarch's notion of a refused right wing, sharing Kromayer and Veith's doubt whether untrained citizen hoplites had the skill to perform an ordered retreat, and suggesting instead that the Theban right simply did not move; Hanson outright dismissed the advance in echelon, pointing out that it had no purpose in the event and that Xenophon does not mention it at all. However, in his more recent overview of Greek military developments, Van Wees returned to the notion that the Theban victory was largely due to this supposed slanted advance.[107] In short, scholars are no closer to a common opinion now than they were in the mid-nineteenth century.

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[98] Buckler 1980, 75–76 (and more recently 2013, 658); Lazenby 1985, 156; Cartledge 1987, 236–238; Tuplin 1987, 84 n. 42. DeVoto (1989, 116–117) and Montagu (2000, 91) also based their account of Leuktra primarily on Plutarch.

[99] Hammond 1997, 359.

[100] Devine 1983, 205; Hanson 1988, 204–205.

[101] Fraser 1942, 16; Cawkwell 1972, 261; Holladay 1982, 96 n. 13; Lazenby 1985, 156–157; Hanson 1988, 196–197.

[102] Buckler 1980, 84–86; Lazenby 1985, 158–159; Anderson 1970, 211–213; Cartledge 1987, 240; DeVoto 1989, 117 n. 8; Hutchinson 2000, 171. In his final, posthumous publication (2013, 661), Buckler reasserted his position.

[103] Devine 1983, 207–210; Hammond 1997, 360 (possibly inspired by Lammert 1899, 27).

[104] Bauer 1893, 409; Buckler 1985.

[105] Delbrück 1908, 155–156; Wolter 1931, 311–312; compare Cawkwell 1972, 262; Buckler 1985, 142–143; Lazenby 1985, 159; Cartledge 1987, 239; Lendon 2005, 107; Lee 2006, 486; Buckler 2013, 666.

### *The Basics*

This overview is certainly not meant to demonstrate scholarly incompetence. If anything, it merely shows how even the greatest minds of the discipline can be frustrated by the imperfect nature of the evidence. No matter how often the subject is tackled, Leuktra remains, in the words of Wheeler, 'an engagement of which the tactical details swirl in uncertainty'.[108] But it does prompt us to restate our earlier question with more urgency: on what grounds have scholars declared Epameinondas a military genius whose victory triggered a tactical revolution?

The ancients themselves are of little help here. In the accounts that survive, the tactics of Leuktra and the reputation of Epameinondas are entirely separate topics. Indeed, Xenophon does not even mention Epameinondas in relation to Leuktra; he only praises him later on, for his handling of the Peloponnesian campaign of 362 and the second battle of Mantineia (*Hell.* 7.5.8–11, 19–25). If the praise of modern scholars applied to the general's whole career, it would be easier to find justification in this contemporary work—but he is usually admired specifically for his tactics at Leuktra, and for this we get nothing from Xenophon. Among later authors, the two most prominent, Diodoros and Plutarch, were no experts on matters of war. Their likely sources for fourth-century history, Ephoros and Kallisthenes, were heavily criticised by Polybios for their poor grasp of military affairs.[109] Furthermore, their understanding of the battle is likely to have been influenced by works on tactical theory of a degree of professionalism and abstraction the Classical Greeks would not have dreamed of.[110] Both these aspects of the context of their works cast doubt on their claims about tactics at Leuktra. In any case, the actual praise for Epameinondas found in these authors is only in general terms; a victory over Sparta was a source of great glory regardless of how it was won. Similarly, Pausanias calls Leuktra the most famous battle of Greek against Greek (9.13.11), but his account of the battle contains not a word about tactics. Nepos, for all his commendation of Epameinondas, only speaks indirectly about Leuktra (15.6, 8). Frontinus, whose work is actually focused on tactical tricks and stratagems, nevertheless adds only fragments to the other accounts, and most of these are to do with how Epameinondas inspired his men. He tells us nothing about the manoeuvres he used.[111] Arrian does mention them (*Takt.* 11.2), but like Diodoros he suggests the use of an infantry formation otherwise unknown from the period, and one of which the existence and usefulness in general has been questioned.[112] Of all these late commentators, Polyainos comes closest to a judgment of tactics. He writes that Epameinondas likened his plan to crushing the head of a snake (*Strat.* 2.3.15). Sadly the line may well be apocryphal,[113] but even if it were authentic, it would point to nothing more than the massed column on the left of which Xenophon already tells us (*Hell.* 6.3.12, 7.5.24). No ancient work gives clear evidence of a tactical revolution at Leuktra.

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[106] Hanson 1988, 196; Spence 1993, 154–155.

[107] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 59–60; Lazenby 1985, 157 (a view shared by Rusch 2011, 198); Hanson 1988, 197–199. Compare Van Wees 2004, 196 (repeated in Toalster 2011, 149–150, and Mann 2013, 20).

[108] Wheeler 2007c, 217. Others are no more confident: 'infinite caution must be taken when attempting to reconstruct the manoeuvres of this battle' (Hutchinson 2000, 166).

At the very least, though, we can be certain of the basics. No scholar has disputed that the Thebans deployed a phalanx fifty shields deep, placed it on their left wing, and thereby won the victory. Are these features in themselves enough to justify Epameinondas' reputation and the role ascribed to him in the development of Greek tactics?

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[109] Polyb. 12.17–22; 12.25f.3–5; Hanson 1988, 204–205. Polybios himself (12.25f.4) notes only that Leuktra was a 'simple battle'.

[110] Anderson (1970, 207–208) made the keen observation that Diodoros' account of Leuktra neatly mirrors his contemporary Onasander's passage on how to counter a crescent formation; compare Diod. 15.55.2–56.2 and Onasander, *Strategikos* 21.8–9. Since no such formation is known from the Classical period, it seems likely that much of Diodoros' battle narrative was made up. Hammond (1997, 357–358), however, disagrees.

[111] Front. *Strat.* 1.11.6, 1.11.16, 1.12.5–7, 4.2.6. Epameinondas is notably absent from the chapter about deployment for battle (2.3.1–24).

[112] Wheeler 2004. Contrast Devine 1983, 205, 211, who argued that Epameinondas invented this formation.

[113] Scholars have long had doubts about the authenticity of the Stratagems: see Parke 1933, 77–79; Fraser 1942, 16; McKechnie 1994, 301.

The Prussians appear to have thought so. They regarded the Theban general's 'battle of the flanks' as a brilliant departure from tradition. This idea is widely acknowledged in modern writings; scholars may disagree on the details of the battle's course, but the very deep Theban formation alone is often considered exceptional, and its deployment on the left flank is habitually described as a truly groundbreaking innovation. Subverting a long history of by-the-model hoplite battle, Epameinondas shocked the Greek world by matching strength against strength, crushing the helpless, petrified Spartans arrayed against him: 'there was nothing in past military experience to prepare Kleombrotos for Epameinondas' innovations.'[114] But was that really the case? It bears repeating that the Prussians failed to agree on a clear distinction between the tactics of Epameinondas and those that had gone before. When we look more closely at what they believed made Theban tactics so extraordinary, we find that each of their positions raises questions.

As we have seen, Rüstow and Köchly claimed that Epameinondas revolutionised warfare by focusing his offensive strength on one flank. However, this contradicts their claim that hoplite battle traditionally hinged on elite troops stationed on the right. The Prussians seem confident of a fundamental difference between earlier hoplite battles and the 'battle of the flanks', but in practice both appear to have been decided by massing the finest men in the army on one end of the line. The Thebans may have held back the other end, the Spartans tended to sacrifice it; either way, it had no impact on the course of the fight. Only the actions of the core contingent mattered. How could the Theban concentration of force count as an innovation if they used it to defeat the equally concentrated Spartans on one wing of the enemy phalanx?[115]

In fact, even the concept of concentrating force in a deep phalanx was hardly new, as several of the Prussians and many later scholars have pointed out.[116] Grundy therefore categorised Leuktra as merely the purest example of the general Greek habit of massing the best troops together on one wing.[117] This view certainly seems more in line with the evidence; after all, even the Spartans themselves had used deep formations before (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34, 6.2.21–22). It may be argued that the fifty-rank Theban formation was at least unusual for its sheer depth, but since the phalanx had no fixed depth, and any number of ranks was theoretically possible, there are no grounds for the notion that any particular number should be seen as an innovation.[118]

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[114] Buckler 1980, 88.

[115] Echeverría (2011, 68) pointed out that, regardless of the deployment of the hoplites, phalanx battles were only really lost when the leading unit was broken—a point actually made by Rüstow and Köchly (1852, 144).

[116] Lammert (1899, 25) and Kromayer (1903, 83) regarded the deep formation as 'the Boeotian national tactic'. See also Delbrück 1908, 117, 155–156; How 1923, 122; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 93–94; Pritchett 1971, 141, 143; Cawkwell 1972, 260–261; Buckler 1985, 142; Lazenby 1985, 156; Cartledge 1987, 240; Hanson 1988, 193; Van Wees 2004, 185; Wheeler 2007c, 218; Chrissanthos 2008, 69; Echeverría 2011, 57–58.

[117] Grundy 1911, 270.

Bauer, Lammert and Delbrück assigned greater importance to the column's location than to its depth. They saw its deployment on the left flank as a clean break with all Greek tradition—a belief that has since become a fixture of scholarship on the subject.[119] Some scholars have even argued that it went against the fundamental tenets of Greek culture itself.[120] But Epameinondas was not the first to deploy his best troops on the left. Authors so intimately aware of the course of battles such as Plataia, Olpai and the Nemea could easily have pointed this out.[121] Instead there are hints in modern scholarship at a conscious desire to gloss over earlier occurrences of this deployment: Cartledge called Leuktra 'the first recorded occasion on which the left had been privileged over the right wing *in a regular hoplite pitched battle in open country*'[122]—a clear example of the 'no true Scotsman' fallacy. The definitions of 'hoplite battle', 'regular pitched battle' and 'open country' can be adjusted at will until the desired set of examples is obtained. Wheeler similarly dismissed earlier cases on the grounds that they were not on the same scale as Leuktra, while Buckler claimed that all earlier examples happened by accident.[123] Given their acknowledgement of a longer tradition of very deep formations, why have historians failed to acknowledge earlier occurrences of armies led from the left?

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[118] Notable battles involving 'deviant' numbers of hoplite ranks before Leuktra include Delion (Thuc. 4.93.4–5), First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.68.2–3) and the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18–19). For more on this, see Chapter 4 below.

[119] Adcock 1957, 25; Anderson 1970, 203. The deployment has been called, among other things, a 'revolutionary change' (Cawkwell 1972, 261), a 'brilliant innovation' (Lazenby 1985, 162) and a 'paradigm shift' (Cartledge 1987, 240; Roberts/Bennett 2014, 260).

[120] Arguments for the supposed tactical consequences of a Greek cultural prejudice against the left have appeared in Lévêcque/Vidal-Naquet 1960 and Echeverría 2011, 69–70. DeVoto (1989, 116–117 n. 7), however, called this a 'fanciful notion'; Buckler (1993) dismissed the theory of Lévêcque and Vidal-Naquet in detail.

[121] Plataia: Hdt. 9.28–30, 9.46–47. Olpai: Thuc. 3.107.4. The Nemea: Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18. Further examples include the battle of Solygeia (Thuc. 4.43.1–4) and the assaults on Stratos (Thuc. 2.81.3) and Olynthos (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40). Only Hanson (1988, 194) has pointed to some of these as predecessors to Leuktra. For detailed discussion of this topic, see Chapter 4 below.

[122] Cartledge 1987, 240 (my emphasis).

[123] Wheeler 2007c, 218; Buckler 2013, 663.

Finally, there is Kromayer and Veith's belief that Epameinondas won his battles by attacking with all his might at the enemy's weakest point. This assertion is frankly baffling in light of the fact that he directly confronted the Spartan contingent of the enemy army in both his major battles. There was no stronger point to be found in all of Greece. Surely, according to the traditional model of hoplite battle, charging a weak segment of the enemy line with one's best troops is exactly what Greek generals had been doing *before* Epameinondas decided to reverse his deployment. The claim is very difficult to understand, and it may simply have been another occasion on which the authors' desire to see the principles of the modern military academy reflected in the ancients proved stronger than their adherence to the evidence.

To their credit, Kromayer and Veith later adapted their view, claiming that the true brilliance of Theban tactics lay in deploying their best troops against the enemy's *best*. Epameinondas left the hard fighting to those most suited for it, intending to 'crush the head of the snake' instead of leaving victory to chance.[124] This analysis fits much more neatly into their conceptualisation of Greek tactics before Leuktra. If we assume, as they did, that the model of hoplite battle held true, then a deliberate attempt to rearrange the phalanx according to the needs of the battle must signal a leap forward in military thought. This view on the tactics of Leuktra has gained wide currency among scholars, who often claim that the concept of 'strength against strength' was the vital element in Epameinondas' victory.[125] Adding to its popularity is the fact that it serves as a useful catch-all for those who wish to avoid attempting a reconstruction of their own and addressing the philological and historiographical problems outlined above. However, again, 'strength against strength' was not an innovation. The earlier examples of armies being led from the left demonstrate this clearly; the whole premise of that deployment was always, and often explicitly, to counter strong troops on the enemy right. This concept is seen in Greek warfare as early as the battle of Salamis.[126] The deployment of the contingents in a phalanx was never set in stone; a string of battle narratives from the Persian Wars onwards bears this out.[127] It is impossible to attribute to Epameinondas a tactical concept without which entire chapters of Herodotos and Thucydides no longer make sense.

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[124] Kromayer/Veith 1928, 93–94.

[125] Grundy 1911, 270–271; Adcock 1957, 76; Buckler 1980, 88; Lazenby 1985, 157; Hutchinson 2000, 234–235; Lendon 2005, 107; Chrissanthos 2008, 69. This concept was the reason for Keegan (2004, 369) to equate Epameinondas' tactics with Blitzkrieg.

[126] Hdt. 8.85.1, with Diod. 11.81.1–2.

[127] Hdt. 9.46–47; Thuc. 3.107.4, 4.43.1–4, 6.67.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 5.2.40; see Chapter 4 below.

### *The Problem*

The discussion above seems to leave little of Epameinondas' great achievement. What is certain was not new; of the rest we cannot be certain. Nevertheless, after a century and a half of debate over what really happened at Leuktra, the Theban general's status as the greatest of hoplite commanders is so firmly entrenched in the discipline that he is treated with something approaching veneration. Lammert claimed his brilliance was of such magnitude that the Greeks themselves did not understand it. J.E. Lendon, who believed nothing very new happened at Leuktra, still called him 'the great Epaminondas', apparently by default. In his article rejecting the idea of a Theban wedge formation, Buckler lamented his 'regrettable duty to deprive Epameinondas of a military invention'; he took care to stress that the Theban general's other innovations remained 'undeniable'. In his final contribution to the Leuktra controversy, published posthumously in 2013, Buckler asserted in true Prussian fashion that those who denied Epameinondas' genius simply failed to understand it.[128]

The result is a reversal of cause and effect. The efforts of many scholars seem to be guided by the preconceived notion that Epameinondas did something that fundamentally changed the military methods of his day. His role as a revolutionary tactician is assumed; the sources are scoured for confirmation. Anderson asserted that there simply had to be 'more to the Theban victory than the old device of massing men to a great depth on one wing'. Holladay was willing to take it for granted that 'Epaminondas, being a military genius, fought in a more sophisticated way than conventional generals'. In his brilliant article on Leuktra, Hanson pointed out that Xenophon's account of the battle is much maligned and rarely used by historians precisely because it *does not* suggest the Thebans did anything unusual or new.[129] This habit of begging the question—assuming the thing that requires proof—causes the controversy over Leuktra to drag on. Everyone admires the tactician Epameinondas, but no one can fully explain why. The key to the riddle is sought in the sources, and scholars continue to produce one interpretation after another, but these end up disputed, mocked, or forgotten. No obvious solution exists.

I would suggest that this endless disagreement is the result of the fact that modern scholars have too rarely addressed their field's consensus about the nature and development of Greek approaches to battle. At the heart of their theories, we find the Prussian model of hoplite battle and the Prussian narrative on Epameinondas' tactical revolution—filtered, translated and elaborated by a hundred and fifty years of scholarship on ancient warfare. I believe there are three interrelated causes behind the worship of Epameinondas, none of which has much to do with the actual accounts of the fight. First is ancient praise; second is the sometimes problematic methodology of modern works on battle and war. Third and most important, however, is the blinding effect of the field's academic tradition.

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[128] Lammert 1899, 29; Lendon 2005, 83; Buckler 1985, 134, 142 (for a similar apology see Kromayer/Veith 1931, 323); Buckler 2013, 662, 669.

[129] Anderson 1970, 203; Holladay 1982, 96–97; Hanson 1988, 191.

Firstly, it is undeniable that the ancients regarded Epameinondas as one of the greatest Greek commanders. Diodoros and Plutarch both relate how his victory gave him enormous prestige, boosting his political influence to unimagined heights; Cicero declared him 'the greatest of the Greeks' (*De Or.* 3.139; *Tusc.* 1.4). The later collectors of stratagems credited him with a long list of ingenious tricks and ploys. Parke noted that he was 'the only serious rival of Iphicrates as the hero figuring in popular tradition'.[130] The fact that Iphikrates still looms larger both in Xenophon and in later sources should give us pause; Plutarch tells the story that, when someone asked Epameinondas himself who was the best general: Epameinondas, Chabrias, or Iphikrates, the Theban replied, 'it is hard to tell while we are alive' (*Mor.* 194a). Nevertheless, any student of the ancients will come away with the impression that Epameinondas was considered a great general in the centuries after his death. This may be why so many modern authors seem to have begged the question of his tactical genius. Perhaps the Prussians, and others following in their wake, asked themselves not what happened at Leuktra, but what it was that made the Theban general great.

This potential teleological bias is strongly encouraged by the second problem—the traditional focus of military history on great leaders and tactical change. The Prussians meant for their studies to instruct, and this intention required some emphasis on the deeds of worthy examples. The sources appeared to suggest one. It has already been pointed out that these scholars regarded ancient and modern warfare as expressions of the same universal truths; meanwhile, it so happened that the greatest hero of Prussia won his most glorious victories by deploying in echelon and fighting a 'battle of the flanks'. Thus Epameinondas came to be seen as a forerunner of Frederick the Great, an early master of similar tactics, his victorious battles against the Spartans at times explicitly equated with the Prussian king's exploits at

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[130] Parke 1933, 78–79, though perhaps he may have overlooked Agesilaos. Few other Greek commanders appear to have inspired any admiration in modern writers, though there are some who praise Xenophon (Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 158), Demosthenes (Lammert 1899, 16), Brasidas (examples collected in Wylie 1992c, 76), or Pagondas (Lendon 2005, 107).

Rossbach and Leuthen.[131] We may be tempted to dismiss such theories as mere Prussian chauvinism, but Adcock chose to revive the analogy, claiming the Theban general 'ranks with or above' Frederick the Great among history's greatest commanders.[132]

Military history of the last few decades might be less concerned with the achievements of great men, but it has its own peculiarities. There is a tendency to categorise military developments in a series of 'revolutions', as well as a keen interest in 'face-of-battle' studies that focus on combat as the beating heart of war.[133] Both methodologies reinforce the status of Epameinondas. Greek military history is an account of many minor changes and developments over time, of which the first signs are often unrecorded or seen without proving decisive. Such a narrative has none of the glamour of a single moment in which tradition is swept aside. The Spartan Eurylochos was the first general on record to place his best hoplites on the left in a land battle, but he was defeated (Thuc. 3.107–108). The Corinthians, who tried the method earlier at sea, were also beaten (Thuc. 1.48.4).[134] Epameinondas, however, crushed the vaunted Spartan hoplites in open battle—something no other commander in the Classical period had managed to do. With the centrality of hoplite battle so firmly established in the common view of Greek war, it is easy to assume that only the decisive use of new tactics in such a battle could signal a meaningful change. The widespread use of the word 'revolution' and its derivatives in the scholarship could be taken to reveal this perspective, as could the downplaying of earlier examples of the same tactics being used in lesser fights. It would be difficult to declare a military revolution unless new means are used to overthrow the old order in a single, magnificent clash.

The third reason, however, is by far the most important. It both facilitates and necessitates the others. Since the earliest studies, it has been assumed that Greek warfare was once rigorously limited; wars were decided by single battles, and battles adhered unfailingly to the Prussian model of hoplite battle. The phase in which Greek warfare *was* ritualised open battle between hoplites supposedly lasted at least until the Peloponnesian War, and the rigid set of tactics that defined such battles remained in place until Epameinondas introduced his revolutionary innovations. These assumptions are largely unfounded, as the many examples anticipating the tactics of Leuktra make clear.[135] But they determine what scholars expect to find. Further arguments and conclusions continue to be based, not on the evidence, but on these assumptions—creating theories that consist of 'stacking assumptions', one idea built on another. If Greek warfare was hoplite battle, and hoplite battle was rigidly prescribed, then Greek warfare could not easily change. As we have seen, this idea began as part of a didactic Prussian narrative on the gradual discovery of tactics, but later Anglophone scholarship enshrined it in broader theories that explained the limits of Greek war as a product of their society, economy and culture. In these theories, the form of war followed from the values of the warriors; they would not conceive of another. The Spartans presided over an immutable, ritualistic, repetitive tactical system of which they were the undisputed champions.

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[131] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 27–28 and elsewhere. Delbrück (1908, 161), however, dismissed these ideas as 'pseudo-academic false comparisons'.

[132] Adcock 1957, 25.

[133] Hanson 2007, 16–18; Wheeler 2007c, 187.

[134] The use of the same tactic at Salamis (Hdt. 8.85.1; Diod. 11.18.1–2) is the earliest known example.

These assumptions *require* a military genius. They *require* a revolution. Any casual subversion of protocol can only be a minor aberration; change must take the form of a wholesale dismissal of tradition, a clear statement that the rules no longer apply. Leuktra provides this statement. It was not the first to deviate, but it deviated more; Epameinondas dispensed with tradition and mighty Sparta was defeated. This, at last, was the tactical revolution. When all the evidence from Greek accounts of battles is disregarded in favour of a fabricated model engagement in which the same depth was always chosen and the same flank always strong, changes to this system *must* have been the work of a great mind, a free-thinking master of war, deservedly praised by the ancients—one who ought to be canonised among the most brilliant generals of all time. The task is then to make the evidence conform to this obvious truth.

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The early academic scholars of Greek warfare, driven by their militaristic outlook and their intention to teach military theory, formulated a universalistic model of Classical Greek battle tactics that formed the backbone of their studies of Greek warfare. The model was a product of their disappointment with the perceived primitivism of Greek military methods. It summed up the hoplite battle as a ritual process, in which armies consisting nearly exclusively of heavy infantry met at a prearranged time in an open plain. Their battle lines were always drawn up eight ranks deep, with the general on the right. Light infantry and cavalry played no role in the fight. Battle unfolded according to a predictable sequence, and the result was accepted as decisive by both sides; the defeated enemy was not pursued or destroyed. Despite changes in strategy and the growing use of mercenaries, this template described all hoplite battles until Epameinondas taught the Greeks the higher principles of deployment and manoeuvre.

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[135] Krentz 2002, 27–31; Lendon 2005, 81–83; Rawlings 2007, 81–85, 90.

Adopted wholesale by English scholars and placed at the core of grand theories about Greek society and culture, this model continues to shape scholarly debate far beyond the topic of Greek approaches to battle. Recent studies have done much to correct the image of agonal, restricted Greek warfare predicated on the ideological supremacy of a particular socio-economic class, and there have been valuable attempts to bring some of these new insights to bear on the field of tactics. However, there has been no synthesis of these studies; a comprehensive alternative model of hoplite battle does not yet exist. If it is to go beyond the views of the Prussians, such a model must be built from the ground up. It must ask the sources a fundamental question: if not honour, or fairness, or a rigid tactical template, what determined the choices of Classical Greeks on the battlefield?

CHAPTER 2

# ‘Improvisers in Soldiering’: Training for War

## The Question

The lasting appeal of the traditional model of hoplite battle may be ascribed at least in part to the fact that the sources indeed do often give an impression of repeated patterns and limited tactical complexity. At first sight, this impression seems to lend support to the theory that the peculiar nature of Greek society and culture produced deliberately restrictive approaches to battle, and that pitched battles were therefore to some extent ritual rather than pragmatic encounters. If we wish to argue—as recent scholarship has persuasively done[1]—that the relative simplicity of Greek warfare was *not* the result of some tacit moral code, we must account for that simplicity in some other way. In this context, modern scholars rightly emphasise the lack of resources available to Greek city-states.[2] On a tactical level, however, I believe the essential factor is an aspect of Greek culture that has not featured prominently in traditional accounts of Greek tactics: the general lack of, and even aversion to, military training.

The question of training is a hidden controversy in the study of Greek warfare. It has not generated anything like the storm of polemical articles and book chapters on the nature of hoplite combat. Academic authors rarely discuss it at length, and often take their own conclusions for granted. In this way, the question has been quietly dividing scholars into distinct camps for over a century. Were the hoplite militias of Classical Greece trained in weapon proficiency and drilled to function collectively in the manner of later heavy infantry? Some think they were.[3] Others think not.[4] The matter is practically

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[1] See especially Krentz 2002; Van Wees 2004, 115–150; 2011; Dayton 2005.

[2] Shipley 1993, 14–18; Van Wees 2000c, 106–108; 2004, 235–240; 2013, 243; Lee 2006, 485–486; Trundle 2010a, 235, 237; Rawlings 2013, 9.

[3] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 127; Lammert 1899, 11–13, 25; Grundy 1911, 269; Gomme 1950, 14–15, 22; Hignett 1963, 50; Detienne 1968, 123; Anderson 1970, 84–91; Cawkwell 1972, 262 n. 4; Pritchett 1974, 208 n. 3; Perlman 1976–1977, 267–268; Hodkinson 1983, 256; Osborne 1987, 145–146; Hanson 1989, 10 (although this is contradicted at 31–32); Debidour 2002, 27–29; Rusch 2011, 14; Heinrichs 2015, 2; Ober 2015, 31.

[4] Droysen 1889, 36; Delbrück 1908, 107; Adcock 1957, 3–4; Whatley 1964, 125, 133; Cartledge 1977, 16–17; Connor 1988, 12 n. 39; Lazenby 1989, 69; Goldsworthy 1997, 8–10; Sidebottom 2004, 84,

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never treated as controversial; only Ridley once decided to go on the offensive, attacking the view that the Greeks lacked training, 'as some moderns foolishly imply'.[5] The lines are not usually so openly drawn. Most recent scholarship may lean towards the opinion that the training of citizen hoplites tended to be very limited, but no clear consensus has yet been reached.[6]

In the chapters that follow, I will assume that the militia of Greek city-states, Spartans aside, received no official training of any kind until the final years of the Classical period. They were taught neither to use their weapons with skill nor to march and fight in formation. It is important to highlight this view at the outset, since it is fundamental to the model of hoplite battle I will try to piece together. This chapter serves to explain why I take this position, and why—as I see it—the sources do not make sense if we do not.

A distinction should be made here between the citizen levy on the one hand and light-armed specialists on the other. The Greeks certainly recognised that the quality of archers, slingers and javelin throwers depended on the amount of practice they had with their weapons (Pl. *Laches* 193b; *Laws* 806a–b; Xen. *An.* 3.4.17; *Kyr.* 2.1.16).[7] Specific peoples are sometimes singled out for their particular skill with certain missile weapons, usually due to their long experience using them (Thuc. 2.81.8, 3.95.3; Xen. *An.* 3.3.16). Thucydides may claim in his account of the battle of Delion that there had never been any 'prepared and equipped' light troops in Athens (4.94.1), but Athenian archers already appear as a separate, specialist force at the battle of Plataia (Hdt. 9.22.1, 60.1), and it seems highly unlikely that the sixteen hundred archers they maintained at the start of the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 2.13.8) were not trained in the use of the bow.[8] We

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106–107; Van Wees 2004, 89–93; Rawlings 2007, 90; Echeverría 2011, 46; Lee 2013, 145–146; Chrissanthos 2013, 315–317; Mann 2013, 11–12.

[5] Ridley 1979, 529–531, 548. Three decades earlier, Gomme (1950, 14) remarked that he was 'not among those who think the hoplite armies only half-trained militia', suggesting an ongoing debate in his day, but he did not indicate who 'those' were.

[6] Lendon (2005, 92, 108–114) and Hunt (2007, 133–137) have presented a developmental model, in which military training became more and more prevalent in the course of the Classical period. This model seems too optimistic, however, and misinterprets the role of small standing forces such as the Sacred Band (discussed in Chapter 5 below).

[7] Anderson 1970, 84. Plutarch (*Mor.* 181b) tells the story that Alexander the Great once commanded a renowned Indian archer to demonstrate his skill. When the man refused, Alexander ordered him executed. As the archer was dragged away, he explained that he had not practiced for a long time, and feared he would fail. Understanding that the man would rather die than fall short of his reputation, Alexander had him released. The story, true or not, beautifully demonstrates the acknowledged importance of regular training in light-armed warfare.

[8] Lippelt 1910, 36–39; Anderson 1970, 114; Trundle 2010b, 141.

hear of Agesilaos offering prizes for the best of his archers and peltasts, causing them to practice their skills zealously (Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16). Xenophon also advises the Athenian cavalry to practice throwing javelins from horseback (*Hipparch.* 1.6) and even explains how to do it (*Hipp.* 12.13).

Similarly, our sources suggest that mercenary armies—whether they consisted of light-armed troops or hoplites—were often made to prepare themselves thoroughly for war.[9] Iason of Pherai boasted that he led out his army for drill and exercise every day (Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.5–6). From Diodoros’ remark that Dionysios II relieved his troops of their ‘wartime exercises’, we may conclude that these had previously been a constant feature of their service (16.5.4). Later tradition held that the fourth-century Athenian general Iphikrates subjected his mercenaries at Corinth to rigorous training (Nepos 11.2), and if there is truth behind the tradition that he turned a force of mercenary hoplites into pikemen (Diod. 15.44.1–4; Nepos 11.1), probably in the context of his service in Egypt, then these men would have to have been carefully drilled for their new tactical role.[10] As we will see in the chapters below, Spartan commanders of mercenary forces like the Ten Thousand seem to have enforced their own system of unit organisation and drill. These practices are likely to have been the inspiration for Philip and Alexander’s policy to keep their troops in constant service and training (Diod. 16.3.1, 17.2.3; Polyain. *Strat.* 4.2.10), to the awe and dismay of their contemporaries in city-state Greece (Dem. 8.11; 18.235).[11]

The peculiar thing, then, is not that *no* Greek warriors were ever trained. Rather, it is that even though *some* of them were trained, the core components of most city-state armies were not. The real question examined in this chapter is how it could be that neither the assumptions about light troops’ weapon skill nor the mercenaries’ professional standards seem to have made their way into the mentality of the citizen levy. This question is one of culture. As I hope to show, it is absolutely fundamental to all aspects of Classical Greek tactical thought, and serves to explain many of the peculiar features that prompted the rise of the traditional view of Greek tactics.

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[9] Lee 2006, 493.

[10] Anderson 1970, 129–132; Van Wees 2004, 197; Sekunda 2014b. For the modern historiographical controversy over the reforms of Iphikrates, see Konijnendijk 2014.

[11] Plutarch (*Pel.* 26.5) and Justin (7.5.2–3) claim that Philip learned the arts of ‘war and generalship’ from Epameinondas. However, as far as we can tell, the Thebans maintained only a small standing force, and we know very little about its training. Therefore, whatever else Philip may have picked up in his formative years, the extent to which Theban military methods could have inspired his eventual army reforms is open to question.

As noted above, the subject of training falls into two parts: formation drill and weapon proficiency. Since these aspects tend to be surprisingly distinct, not only in modern scholarship, but also in the sources, I will discuss them separately before commenting more broadly on the absence of training in Greek warfare.

## Good Order

The concept of formation drill is crucial for those who wish to see Greek armies as collections of tactical units capable of sophisticated manoeuvres; after all, without a clear and well-maintained system of ranks and files, such manoeuvres cannot be attempted. An army cannot wheel, face about or move from column into line and back if it has not been previously trained to do so. Unit drill is therefore sometimes taken for granted even by those who assume a generally low level of Greek training for war.[12] This view is apparently justified by frequent references in Greek sources to the dangers of disorder in the ranks.[13]

Yet there is no evidence for formation drill anywhere outside of Sparta. Outside of a few clearly exceptional cases, nothing suggests that it existed. We find no sign of any public efforts to instil proper discipline in the whole of the hoplite body until the two-year military training programme known as the *ephebeia* was made mandatory at Athens around 336/5.[14]

Admittedly, the *ephebeia* is attested well before this time. The clearest evidence is Aischines' claim that he did garrison duty with his fellow ephebes (1.49; 2.167), which must have been around 372/1.[15] Some scholars have used these passages to make the case that, by the early fourth century or even earlier, all Athenian youths were already subjected to some form of the training programme known from the 330s.[16] However, as Gauthier has pointed out, Xenophon urges the city to provide regular pay for the ephebes in a pamphlet written around 355 (*Poroi* 4.52). This advice only makes sense if the ephebes were not compensated for their service at this time. Since most Athenians would not have been able to afford two years' military service at their own expense, the *ephebeia* cannot have been mandatory for all citizens.[17] It would have been open only members of the leisure class, who could presumably show off their civic spirit by taking part in it, as Aischines' example shows.

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[12] See for example Delbrück 1908, 138–139; Ducrey 1985, 69–72; Lee 2006, 483; Matthew 2012, 171–172; Crowley 2012, 42.

[13] Gathered in Krentz 1985b, 58–59; Luginbill 1994, 57; Crowley 2012, 49–53.

[14] Reinmuth 1971, 133; Siewert 1977, 102; Rawlings 2000, 237–239, 241; Chankowski 2010, 129; Crowley 2012, 25–26; Pritchard 2013, 214–215. Knoepfler (2015, 62–67) dates the change to 335/4. For the nature of the training programme, see [Arist.] *Ath.Pol.* 42.2–5.

[15] For bibiliography on the dating of Aischines' youth, see Chankowski 2010, 115 n. 266. In addition to the evidence from Aischines, Reinmuth (1971, 1–2) presented an inscription honouring an official whose duties were linked to the *ephebeia*, which he dated to 361/0. However, Lewis (1973, 254) showed that this dating cannot be right. He suggested that the text probably belongs with the glut of ephebic inscriptions appearing from 335 onward—reconfirming that such inscriptions are unknown before this date.

Whether this would have done anything to improve the general fighting ability of the militia is open to question. We hear about their duties only in general terms from Xenophon and Aischines, whose focus is on other matters. Xenophon describes their training as 'exercise in the gymnasion' (*Poroi* 4.52), but only to make the point that without a more reliable system of compensation they will not do so properly. Meanwhile, neither author tells us anything at all about their numbers. In a speech dated to 355, Isokrates laments that 'though we undertake to make war on just about everyone, we do not train ourselves for it' (8.44); the number of those who *did* train must have been insignificant if it could be glossed over without a word. Only after the reforms of the 330s did state funding allow all citizens to participate in the exercises of the *ephebeia*.

As far as we can tell, no other city-state imposed a similar training programme on its citizens during the Classical period. We might expect to find signs of less comprehensive forms of communal preparation for battle, but such things are equally unheard of. From the late fifth century onwards, we find the occasional reference to a troop review (ἐξέτασις), but such displays served mainly to show off the size and spirit of an army to friends and enemies; nothing indicates that they consisted of anything more than drawing up the troops.[18] The only exception, the mock charge carried out by the Ten Thousand during a hoplite review at Tyriaeion, is specifically said to have been Kyros the Younger's idea, intended to impress the queen of Kilikia (Xen. *An.* 1.2.17–18).

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[16] Jaeger 1945, 250; Pélékidis 1962, 19–49, 71–79; Reinmuth 1971, 123; Ridley 1979, 531–534; Polinskaya 2003, 102; Hornblower 2007, 35–36. Others simply take it for granted that this must have been the case: see for example Osborne 1987, 146; Hutchinson 2000, xii.

[17] Gauthier 1976, 193–194; Van Wees 2004, 94–95; Chankowski 2010, 118–119.

[18] For examples of troop reviews, see Thuc. 4.74.3, 6.96.3; Xen. *An.* 1.2.9; *Hell. Oxy.* 15.1. Demosthenes (4.26) draws an explicit contrast between military display in festivals and processions and the actual business of war.

Xenophon mentions the more regular public review of cavalry at Athens, but he points out that only individuals and their horses were actually judged; manoeuvres were only held to reward the citizens for their investment with a suitably impressive spectacle. The author's recommendations for improvements to the review further demonstrate that the manoeuvres displayed by the contemporary Athenian cavalry were not even up to the modest standards found in his work.[19] While both Xenophon (*Hipparch.* 3.11–13; *Kyr.* 2.3.17–20) and Plato (*Laws* 830d–831a) recommend sham battles as a form of training, there is practically nothing to suggest that their advice was ever brought into practice.[20] Diodoros may report collective training for Spartans (15.65.6) and mercenaries (16.5.4), but we find no ordinary hoplite militia engaging in such exercises in his work, let alone in earlier authors. Even the uniquely zealous activity of the Thebans after their victory at Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23) is described as a matter of individual enthusiasm rather than coordinated effort. In short, evidence of deliberate unit drill and group training is conspicuously absent from the sources.

Scholars are always happy to suggest that a silence like this is the result of ancient authors skipping over the mundane and the obvious. In this case, however, we have several reasons to believe that it reflects a genuine absence. For one thing, Plato says so: after describing what he regards as a necessary training programme, he states categorically that 'no such group training or competition now exists in any city-state at all, except maybe in a very small way' (*Laws* 831b).[21] For another, when Xenophon offers a detailed description of the formation evolutions mastered by the Spartans in his *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians* (11.5–8), he does so with the obvious goal of pitching it to his audience. Xenophon openly addresses 'the common view' that Spartan infantry drill is extremely complex; after a brief outline of its features, he points out that 'none of this is difficult to learn', and emphasises that the

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[19] Xen. *Hipparch.* 1.13–15; 3.6–14. On the *dokimasia* of the cavalry, see Blaineau 2015, 231–233.

[20] Hodkinson (2006, 139–140) has noted that not even the Spartans seem to have trained in this way. The only evidence for historical sham battles is an oblique reference involving the Athenian cavalry (Xen. *Hipparch.* 1.20), and the late testimony of Polyainos (*Strat.* 3.9.32) that Iphikrates had his men carry out sham operations of every kind. The latter anecdote seems unrelated to Xenophon's story of how Iphikrates trained his trireme crews in 373 (*Hell.* 6.2.27–32), since this story involves no sham fights and no word about training land troops.

[21] The exception may be a reference to the small standing forces that existed in a number of Greek city-states by Plato's time (see Chapter 5 below). We may reasonably assume that these units were trained, but we have no evidence as to the nature of that training.

Spartans easily carry out manoeuvres 'that the *hoplomachoi* consider very difficult'. The *hoplomachoi*, drillmasters for hire, are presented here as amateurs and charlatans; they pretend to be highly skilled in some sophisticated military art, but they fail to instruct their pupils in even the most basic formation evolutions. Xenophon's message is that what many Greeks took to be an arcane and complicated system could actually be readily adopted if the reader would simply follow his instructions. Several modern scholars have noted that there would be no point to such advice if other city-states already subjected their hoplites to drill programmes of their own.[22]

It is clear from Xenophon's other works that his enthusiastic account of Spartan formation drill in this particular treatise was no casual rhetorical experiment. Where Thucydides largely described the Spartan army as a strange creature whose methods were a marvel to ordinary Greeks,[23] Xenophon instead seems to have gone out of his way to stress the benefits of their system of unit organisation and training. The infantry drill outlined in his treatise on Sparta also features heavily in the *Kyroupaideia* (2.1.26–29, 2.2.6–10, 2.3.21–22, 3.3.57); his manual for the Athenian cavalry commander advocates a similar system for horsemen (*Hipparch.* 2). He describes in detail the nature and uses of the picked units of the Ten Thousand, which had been drawn up according to the Spartan model of unit subdivision (*An.* 3.4.21–23). He even interrupts the flow of his *Hellenika* to deliver a precise account of Spartan formation evolutions during king Agesilaos' campaign of 370—seizing the opportunity to showcase the application of these evolutions in practice (6.5.18–19). His prolonged exposure to Spartan military practice had revealed to him an approach to unit tactics that he felt to be vastly superior to the methods of other Greeks; in his writings, he did all he could to persuade others to adopt it. Needless to say, neither Thucydides' awe nor Xenophon's evangelism make any sense if unit drill was common in Classical Greece.

What was it that got these authors so excited? Xenophon's comments on the straightforwardness of Spartan formation drill do not seem exaggerated; the system really does appear to have been surprisingly simple. Thucydides tells us that Spartan hoplite formations were composed of smaller units that were divided into yet smaller units, each led by its own commander; the result was an army that consisted, in Thucydides' phrase, of 'leaders leading leaders' (ἄρχοντες ἀρχόντων, 5.66.3–4). In battle, nearly the entire front rank of a Spartan phalanx consisted of officers. As Xenophon points out, the men in the other ranks had to learn nothing more than to follow the man in front of them. The elaborate officer hierarchy meant that orders could be passed down quickly from commander to subordinate all the way along the front rank; the advance of the officers would set the whole phalanx in motion (*Lak. Pol.* 11.4–6). In the *Kyroupaideia* (2.2.8, 3.3.57), Xenophon gives another account of how this works. The army in question is meant to be Persian, but its drill is clearly inspired by Spartan practice—'all should focus only on this: to follow the man in front'.[24] All tactical manoeuvres followed from this principle.

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[22] Cawkwell 1983, 398; Lazenby 1989, 69; Van Wees 2004, 90.

[23] During his account of First Mantineia, Thucydides repeatedly stresses the unique habits of the Spartans in battle: their officer hierarchy (5.66.3–4; Anderson 1965, 3; Van Wees 2004, 89; Hornblower 2007, 35; Barley 2015, 49–50), their omission of pre-battle speeches (5.69.2), their slow advance to the sound of flutes (5.70; Cartledge 1977, 16 n. 43), and the fact that they hardly pursued their fleeing enemies (5.73.4).

The fact that such a basic notion of unit drill was worth advertising to the wider Greek world is revealing; Xenophon's insistence that, contrary to popular belief, it was easy to learn, speaks volumes about the level of organisation and training of hoplite formations outside Sparta.[25] Apparently he could not take it for granted that his readers would understand either the principle or the merits of a file leader guiding his file through simple formation evolutions. Meanwhile, the passages describing unit drill can also tell us a good deal about the nature and the limitations of that drill even where it existed.

The account of unit training in the *Kyroupaideia* (2.2.6–10) is particularly interesting here for several reasons. Firstly, it involves the only direct display of unit drill in the whole of Classical Greek literature. The scene is presented as an amusing anecdote, shared between 'Persian' nobles, on the ineptitude of new recruits; Van Wees may be right to interpret it primarily as a derisive tale of the common man's inability to grasp the methods of military professionals.[26] However, it also betrays a certain sensitivity to the apparent ridiculousness of formation drill to those who are not familiar with it. The recruits do not understand why they should keep their assigned position in the file, or how they should respond to the commands issued by different levels of officers. Once these things have been made clear—to the reader as much as to the troops involved (2.2.8)—the recruits take the lesson too literally and follow their unit commander around wherever he goes. Even in Xenophon’s imagination, drill did not come naturally to warriors, and its uses were hardly self-evident when it was taken out of the context of military action.

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[24] For Spartan inspiration behind many elements of the *Kyroupaideia*, see Pritchett 1994b, 114; Mueller-Goldingen 1995, 69–70; Hunt 1998, 204 n. 98; Nadon 2001, 30–41; Christesen 2006, 52–53 (but note the cautious assessment of Tuplin 1994, with comments on organisation and tactics at 146). Anderson (1970, 98–100) took the passages on training in the *Kyroupaideia* as evidence that unit subdivision and formation drill were common to all Greek armies, but this apparently does not take into account the author and his intentions, or the obvious similarities with practices he describes elsewhere as being unique to Sparta.

[25] Krentz 2010, 62; see also Pritchett 1974, 230; Lazenby 1985, 3–4; Hodkinson 2006, 134; Hornblower 2007, 35; Millender 2016, 168–169.

[26] Van Wees 2004, 87–88.

Secondly, the passages demonstrate the haphazard nature of unit training even in this idealised army. Kyros is made to honour and reward particularly diligent officers, inspiring others to follow their example—a major feature of Xenophon’s theory of command.[27] This practice suggests, though, that the necessary standards of formation drill for Xenophon’s fictional force were neither defined nor enforced. The actual level of training depended largely on the officers’ attitude to drill and their desire to please the general, rather than on systematic reviews and disciplinary measures. Indeed, Thucydides shows that official standards of drill and deployment did not exist even at Sparta: at First Mantineia the component units of the Spartan army ‘were not all drawn up in the same depth, but as each officer wanted’ (5.68.3)—presumably in accordance with their own ideas about what the situation required.[28] For all their troop reviews, we do not possess a single example of a Greek army commander held personally accountable for the level of drill of his troops.

It may be argued that this point relies too much on a straight reading of an author whose clear intention was to teach a particular leadership style. Throughout the works of Xenophon we find the conviction that obedience has to be earned rather than obtained by force; it follows that he would not advertise training methods that relied on strict discipline and harsh punishment. Yet Xenophon was himself a veteran and a general, who spent much of his life in the company of mercenaries and Spartans; moreover, he seems to have taken a special interest in the problems of raising military forces to a higher standard.[29] His views on the matter should be taken seriously. The fact that his own men once put him on trial for the beatings he had inflicted on them (*An.* 5.8) suggests that the attitudes he wished to impart on his readers were largely the lessons he learned from experience.

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[27] Xen. *Kyr.* 2.1.23–24, 2.3.17–24; see also, for example, *An.* 1.9.19; *Hell.* 3.4.16; *Hieron* 9.6; *Hipparch.* 1.24–26; *Kyr.* 6.2.4–6; *Oik.* 21.5–7.

[28] Hodkinson (2009, 448) has plausibly connected this to the essentially private nature of the *syssitia* around which the Spartan army’s component units were organised.

[29] Lendon 2005, 73–75.

Seen in this light, his notion of the ideal general, with its emphasis on leading by example and inspiring willing obedience, offers a crucial insight into the realities of Greek warfare. Many modern scholars have pointed out that Greek levies fiercely resisted any kind of enforced military discipline. Some took their strict generals to court; others physically attacked them. Xenophon complains that his fellow citizens 'glorify looking down on their commanders' (*Mem.* 3.5.16); these commanders had practically no legitimate means at their disposal to assert their authority over their troops.[30] The subordination and obedience required for organised warfare seems to have been incompatible with the values of Greek citizens, whether these found their origins in the competitive culture of the leisure class or the egalitarian ethos of radical democracies. As Griffith has noted, 'the Greek moral and political vocabulary was always thin on words like 'obedience' and 'subordination'.'[31] Suspicious of any imposed hierarchy, wary of the possible tyrannical ambitions of their leaders, and unwilling to compromise in any way on their status as free men, the militia army refused to be disciplined.[32]

Yet this attitude conflicted with the need for these very men to submit to military authority in wars fought by large citizen armies. Authors throughout the Classical period show themselves well aware of this need:

> ἀναρχίας δὲ μεῖζον οὐκ ἔστιν κακόν.
> αὕτη πόλεις ὄλλυσιν, ἥδ᾽ ἀναστάτους
> οἴκους τίθησιν, ἥδε συμμάχου δορὸς
> τροπὰς καταρρήγνυσι
>
> There is no evil worse than disobedience. This destroys cities; this displaces households; this shatters the turns of the allied spear.
>
> SOPH. *Ant.* 672–675[33]

> παρασκευαστέον ὅπως εὐπειθεῖς οἱ ἄνδρες ὦσιν: ἄνευ γὰρ τούτου οὔθ᾽ ἵππων ἀγαθῶν οὔθ᾽ ἱππέων ἐπόχων οὔθ᾽ ὅπλων καλῶν ὄφελος οὐδέν.

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[30] Ridley 1979, 513–514; Hamel 1998, 59–63; Hornblower 2000, 57–61, 72–73; Van Wees 2004, 108–112; Eckstein 2005, 483–484; Lendon 2005, 74–77; Christ 2006, 40–41, 95 n. 16; Crowley 2012, 105–107; Rawlings 2013, 13, 20–21; Chrissanthos 2013, 315–317.

[31] Griffith 1998, 25. He went on to suggest (26) that warfare was the only exception to the Greek disinclination to obey orders, but cited no evidence to support this claim.

[32] Bettalli 2002, 117–119; Hornblower 2004, 247, 263; Harris 2010, 414–415.

[33] The *Antigone* of course has many complex things to say on the matter of disobedience, but it remains striking that this list of bad effects moves immediately to the military sphere.

> You must make the men obedient; otherwise neither good horses nor well-seated riders nor beautiful armour are any help at all.
>
> XEN. *Hipparch.* 1.7[34]

How could the obedience of free men be secured? In the *Laws* (942a–945b), Plato briefly lets his thoughts run wild: for the sake of military effectiveness, he argues, individual freedom of action should be utterly extinguished from all aspects of life. Both humans and their domesticated animals must live every moment obeying the commands of others. But the actual military laws he goes on to sketch are heavily circumscribed by legal technicalities and allow almost anything except outright desertion. The initial rant perhaps reveals the frustration of those who recognised the fundamental problem, but could find no easy way to solve it. The citizen could not be made to change his nature. Only the Spartans were taught from infancy to obey; other Greeks would not adopt their attitudes, and Spartan generals who gave their allies a taste of Spartan discipline won nothing but their wrath.[35]

The solution Xenophon offers is more constructive. Instead of using force, he suggests that a general should *inspire* his men to obey—an approach that left their sense of equality intact. A system of honours and rewards served to entice them, while the general’s own example showed them that he knew what he was doing, and that his demands on them were not unfair:

> ὃς ἂν μάλιστα εἰδὼς φαίνηται ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν, τούτῳ μάλιστα ἐθέλειν τοὺς ἄλλους πείθεσθαι.
>
> He who appears to know best what should be done—him, above all, the others wish to obey.
>
> XEN. *Mem.* 3.3.9[36]

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[34] The sentiment is repeated in Xen. *Mem.* 3.3.8, 3.4.8. Xenophon’s first advice to the Ten Thousand was to appoint new officers and restore discipline, ‘for without leaders nothing good or worthy can be accomplished in any field at all, and in war in particular. And good order saves lives, it seems, while disorder has already destroyed many’ (*An.* 3.1.38).

[35] Hornblower 2000, 72–74. Plutarch (*Lys.* 15.5) preserves the story that when the Spartan Kallibios struck an Athenian with his staff, his colleague Lysander scolded him, saying that he ‘did not know how to rule free men’. It is worth noting here the villainous Menelaos in Sophokles’ *Aias*, whose rant about how fear fosters obedience (1071–1083) marks him out as a caricature of contemporary Spartans. For this view, see Rawson 1969, 19; Rose 1995, 71–73; Garvie 1998, 216, 223; Finglass 2011, 442, although this interpretation has been qualified to some extent by Hesk (2003, 111–113).

[36] See also Xen. *Ag.* 6.4; *Hipparch.* 6.4–6; *Kyr.* 1.6.21–22.

If a commander wanted his men to train, all he had to do was hone his own skills as a leader and warrior, and show that those who followed his lead would profit from it.

This approach seems to make the most of a difficult situation, but the implications for the question of training are huge. What Xenophon suggests by the nature of his advice is that Greek armies were not only commonly untrained, but that they *could not be trained* unless a suitably inspiring commander was present. If Greek citizens felt no urge to impress their general, it would be nearly impossible to get them to do his bidding. If they did not care to train, they could not be made to do so (*Oik.* 21.4).[37] Lendon has pointed out the complete absence in Xenophon of any sense that a general ought to be obeyed simply because he is a general.[38] Military authority was not considered valid as such. Even the Spartan king Agesilaos accepted that his mercenaries were not obliged to endure hardship for his sake (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.13); in Kyros' fictional army, men are given special honours for the mere act of following orders (Xen. *Kyr.* 2.3.8). Somewhat pathetically, Xenophon suggests the option of individually persuading men to embrace military discipline;[39] perhaps even more revealing is his endorsement of the idea of manipulating mundane activities so that they might surreptitiously serve as training (*Hell.* 6.2.27–32). These were the methods a non-Spartan commander was forced to use.

It is not surprising that generals tended to concentrate instead on invoking the courage of the troops, so that they would fight, perhaps poorly, but bravely. Their efforts were sometimes explicitly linked to the absence of training. In the first funeral oration of the Peloponnesian War, Perikles famously contrasted Spartan discipline with Athenian courage, claiming that the latter was just as effective in war, and a lot less hard work (Thuc. 2.39). The Athenians apparently needed such reassurance.[40] One of the typical ways to boost the morale of the hoplite body was the general's speech before battle[41]—and Thucydides notes that the Spartans did not bother with such a speech, believing it to be no substitute for careful preparation (5.69.2).[42] Xenophon has his hero Kyros explain at length that speeches cannot instantly turn bad warriors into good ones; only training can make men reliable in battle (*Kyr.* 3.3.49–55). Again, the Greeks were clearly aware that drill was needed to make an army effective; the militia, however, would not accept it, and so their commander's best hope was to rely on their vigorous fighting spirit instead.

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[37] Xenophon elsewhere offers the example of the Spartan Mnasippos, whose mercenaries resented him—'the very thing which is least helpful in battle' (*Hell.* 6.2.19).

[38] Lendon 2005, 74–75.

[39] Xen. *Hipparch.* 1.18–19 and 22–24; *Mem.* 3.3.10–11; *Oik.* 13.9; see Martin 1887, 377–379, 441; Chrissanthos 2013, 317; Blaineau 2015, 215–216. Christ (2006, 42–43, 63) regards it as a feature of Athenian democratic ideology that persuasion was preferred over compulsion even in military affairs.

[40] The passage puzzled Hornblower (1991, 303–304), who noted that 'neither [Thucydides] nor Pericles (…) can have thought anything so silly as that effortless superiority could be achieved in land fighting.' I agree—but the funeral oration was surely not the place to remind the Athenians of their shortcomings.

If we were to assume, therefore, that Greek battle lines consisted of carefully drilled hoplite formations, we would not just be making groundless assumptions—we would be asking the impossible. Led by our own preconceptions about heavy infantry fighting, we would impose upon the Greeks a form of unit training that ran counter to their very idea of what it meant to be a free Greek. Even if a general could persuade them that formation drill was for their own safety and for the common good, it could still be resisted by all or part of the army as ridiculous, needlessly demanding, or bafflingly complex. To attempt to train one's men was to do things the hard way. We should doubt whether the span of a normal campaign would have given a citizen general the time to make any significant progress—and whether many generals would have bothered to try. Ulterior motives could make the path of least resistance even more tempting; Polybios claims that many an ambitious cavalry commander in the Achaian League would totally neglect to impose vital discipline on the men who might some day elect him to higher office (10.22.8–9). Similar reasoning would certainly have affected the officers of Classical Athens. Few generals had the character, the means, the will and the opportunity to forge a militia into a well-trained force.[43]

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[41] The reality of pre-battle speeches was called into question by Hansen (1993 and 1998), who argued that they were a physical impossibility and therefore could be no more than a rhetorical fiction invented by historiographers. However, several scholars have rejected his argument in detail (see Pritchett 1994a; Hornblower 1996, 82–83, 396, 442; Clark 1995; Ehrhardt 1995; and most comprehensively Pritchett 2002, 1–80).

[42] The Spartans may not have lived up to this rule. Xenophon includes only two pre-battle speeches in the whole of his *Hellenika*, but one of these is by the Spartan Archidamos (7.1.30; see Gray 1989, 100, 132–134).

[43] Pritchett (1974, 228–229) offers only Iphikrates, Iason of Pherai and Philip of Macedon as non-Spartan examples. It is interesting to note that Iphikrates—the only ordinary citizen of the three—became known as a ruthless disciplinarian in the later tradition; no trace of such character can be found in Xenophon.

If this conclusion is right, we should expect the Greeks to field mob-like militia armies incapable of formation evolutions. Given their lack of training and discipline, such evolutions could not be carried out without courting chaos. The fact that both Thucydides and Xenophon felt it necessary to explain the key role of file leaders in Spartan drill suggests that the concept was entirely unknown outside Sparta, and the ancients offer no alternative basis for formation evolutions. The system found in the Hellenistic tacticians relies on the same concept. Without these officers, whose presence and expertise allowed the rest of the hoplites to focus on following the man in front, how could any phalanx be expected to wheel or countermarch without falling into disorder?

This picture of the abilities of the hoplite militia may seem unfairly pessimistic, but it is exactly what we find in the sources. Ancient accounts hardly ever imply the existence of unit training. In fact, they often suggest that such training was precisely what was lacking in the skill set of Greek warriors. Classical armies typically did not carry out any kind of battlefield manoeuvre that might require formation drill, unless they were commanded by a Spartan. Modern scholars who set out to explain the successes of certain forces tend to overestimate the skills needed to achieve them, creating a problem that can only be solved by assuming extensive training.[44] In reality, the problem they grapple with is of their own creation. Our sources present a consistent picture. They tell us that Greek militias were untrained, and show them acting like untrained militias. If we assume the phalanx was normally a well-drilled infantry formation, it becomes a lot harder to explain its often crude tactics and unreliable behaviour in battle.

There is only one apparent exception to the rule. Xenophon offers this account of Epameinondas' preparation for the battle of Mantineia in 362:

> ἐπεί γε μὴν παραγαγὼν τοὺς ἐπὶ κέρως πορευομένους λόχους εἰς μέτωπον ἰσχυρὸν ἐποιήσατο τὸ περὶ ἑαυτὸν ἔμβολον, τότε δὴ ἀναλαβεῖν παραγγείλας τὰ ὅπλα ἡγεῖτο.
>
> It was not until he had made the *lochoi* move along to the wing and faced them forward, strengthening the mass formation around him, that he gave the order to take up arms and led on.
>
> *Hell.* 7.5.22

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[44] See for instance Lammert 1899, 25; Anderson 1970, 84; Cawkwell 1972, 260–262; Ridley 1979, 526, 530–534; Hanson 1989, 136–137; Crowley 2012, 42–43.

The verb παράγω, 'to lead past', is part of Xenophon's tactical terminology. He uses it elsewhere to describe an element of Spartan formation drill, typically translated as 'wheeling from column into line' (*An.* 4.3.26, 4.6.6; *Kyr.* 2.3.21, 8.5.15; *Lak. Pol.* 11.6).[45] If this technical meaning is the correct reading here, we must conclude that the men of Epameinondas' army had been taught Spartan-style formation evolutions. Yet the manoeuvre is completely unparalleled, and we have no indication of when, where or why the Thebans and their allies might have adopted the necessary infantry organisation or learned the necessary drill. While Xenophon notes that the victory at Leuktra provoked such enthusiasm for war that even the ordinary hoplites of the Boiotian militia started to train (*Hell.* 6.5.23), the reference is only to individual physical training for combat (ἐγυμνάζοντο πάντες περὶ τὰ ὅπλα), and to the army of 370, eight years before Mantineia. What could account for the unique skill ascribed to the Thebans in this passage?

Instead of assuming that the vast army of Epameinondas was uniquely, collectively willing to embrace the discipline and training necessary to carry out formation drill, it seems more plausible to suggest that Xenophon applied his technical term to what was in actuality a much less formal process. In fact, his works reveal that he did not think of the word as exclusively designating a strictly defined tactical concept. He is happy to use it to describe how Tissaphernes moved some of his Persian infantry into the flanks of the Ten Thousand (*An.* 3.4.14) and to explain how the leading units of the Ten Thousand's hollow square would fall back and temporarily walk behind others to narrow the front (*An.* 3.4.21). He also employs it in an even less specifically tactical sense, to describe an army marching past a place (*Kyr.* 5.4.44) or simply being shown the way (*An.* 4.8.8, 7.2.8). Finally, he uses it in the sense that other Classical authors do, namely that of leading someone into a room or gathering (*An.* 7.6.3). In other words, Xenophon may have given the term a specific tactical meaning in particular contexts, but even to him, it still meant 'to lead past'; it could be used to describe a wide range of different kinds of movement. In this case, Xenophon used it to indicate the process by which *lochoi* from the Boiotian right were moved along the rest of the army. Whether this usage is technical or not is unclear.[46] Even if he deliberately expressed their redeployment in terms of Spartan formation evolutions, his account does not require us to assume that they manoeuvred in an orderly, measured fashion. In the context of a complete lack of other evidence for non-Spartan unit drill, it seems prudent to err on the side of simplicity.

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[45] Lendle 1995, 254.

[46] On the one hand, Xenophon's non-technical use of the term tends to apply to whole formations or armies, not to sub-units like the *lochos*. On the other hand, his technical use of the term tends to be much more detailed, describing the movements of units smaller than the *lochos*, or even individual files, and specifying the officers involved.

No other formation evolutions or manoeuvres are seen in practice. Nothing suggests that the average hoplite militia was capable of either. Overconfident commanders ignored this to their cost. When Kleon at Amphipolis ordered his twelve hundred hoplites to wheel (ἐπιστρέψας) their whole right wing (Thuc. 5.10.4), it quickly became clear that his troops did not actually possess the required tactical skill to complete the manoeuvre.[47] The result was confusion and chaos in the Athenian force, which the Spartan commander, Brasidas, immediately exploited to great effect. This remains the only example I have found of a phalanx not trained by Spartans attempting a manoeuvre of this kind. The typical hoplite formation did not attempt anything so complex. Instead, it simply charged. This was a tried and tested method—but it was also the best it could do.

Indeed, we should probably not picture the charge of 'ordered squares'[48] when we think of hoplite battle. It is true that, by the late fifth century, it had become possible for Greek authors to specify the number of ranks in a line of battle, suggesting that heavy infantry was drawn up in a more or less regular grid pattern.[49] We may be tempted to conclude from this feature of Classical battle accounts that Greek armies were trained to manoeuvre and fight in carefully ordered formations. But the mere existence of ranks and files does not automatically imply an elaborate system of unit drill, or even the ability to preserve such a grid pattern while in motion. The counsels of Xenophon, cited above, suggest that deployment and manoeuvre were seen as separate problems; Greek drillmasters may have mastered the former, but the latter remained beyond their reach.

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[47] Anderson's analysis of the manoeuvre (1965, 3–4) starts from the premise that Athenian hoplites were drilled to wheel and countermarch. He hypothesised a better way in which the Athenian right could have extracted itself, and blamed Kleon for giving the wrong order in the heat of the moment. However, our sources show that the attempted manoeuvre was unique and unprecedented for Athenian hoplites; Anderson does not remark upon the fact that all the evidence he cites to support his argument is derived from Spartan or post-Classical practice.

[48] Hanson 1989, 10.

[49] The battle descriptions of Herodotos and those of Thucydides' first three books never specify the depth of any formation. The earliest mention of a certain number of 'shields' as a measure of formation depth is in a fragment of Aristophanes' lost *Babylonians*, produced in 426 (Van Wees 2004, 185). The earliest military engagement for which we are given such details is the battle of Delion in 424 (Thuc. 4.93.4–94.1).

The separation of these two concepts in tactical thought suggests that the grid pattern deployment may originally have been devised as an end in itself, long before any Greek knew of the possibilities of formation drill. A formation in ranks and files offered several advantages that justified its introduction as such. Width and depth were essential variables in Greek tactics even in the early days of massed hoplite battle, as Herodotos' account of Marathon makes clear;[50] the introduction of a regular grid pattern allowed both to be managed with far greater precision when the army was being drawn up. It also allowed for better estimates of numbers and for the identification of absentees. Krentz has further suggested that the initial establishment of order out of chaos helped boost the morale of the troops.[51] Finally, the grid pattern guaranteed the presence of an unbroken line of shields at the beginning of battle, a front that—unlike earlier *ad hoc* massed formations—did not present any obvious weaknesses that could be targeted by enemy hoplites or horsemen. It is in this context that we should see the ancients' noted emphasis on the importance of good order.[52] Crucially, its merits were passive in nature; the well-ordered initial deployment existed for its own sake, rather than as a mere precursor to the next step of maintaining the formation during the advance. It did not, therefore, require training.

In fact, hoplites throughout the Classical period continued to charge into battle at a run, so that their initial order was almost immediately lost.[53] A combination of terror and bloodlust brought on an urge to charge screaming into the fray that proved either too strong to resist or too useful to temper. The Spartans may have marched into battle at an even pace to the sound of flutes, but Thucydides found it necessary to explain this Spartan habit to his readers, saying it served 'not for the sake of the god', but to keep the army from breaking formation, 'as large armies often do when they advance' (5.70).[54] His explanation suggests that this device to keep order in battle was unknown to other Greeks.[55] Even the veteran mercenaries of the Ten Thousand ran into battle (Xen. *An.* 1.8.18, 6.5.27; *Hell.* 4.3.17). Xenophon's historical fiction reveals the power of the instinct to abandon good order and charge. Leading an eager phalanx against the Assyrians, his hero Kyros loses himself in the moment, 'forgetting to march' and rushing into battle with his men (*Kyr.* 3.3.61–63).

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[50] Hdt. 6.111–114; for a more detailed discussion of this battle, see Chapters 3 and 4 below.

[51] Krentz 1994, 45.

[52] Tellingly, the relevant passages listed by Crowley (2012, 49–53) typically concern *preparation* for battle, rather than battle itself. The Syracusans twice abandoned their plan to fight a battle when they had trouble forming up (Thuc. 6.98.3; 7.3.3). The Ten Thousand were terrified of being forced to fight before they had a chance to deploy (Xen. *An.* 1.8.1–4), which is what caused the Athenian defeat at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.10.3–8). While Thucydides (6.97.3–4) blames the failure of the Syracusan assault on Epipolai on disorder, the long uphill charge against a prepared and numerically superior enemy was surely doomed to fail either way.

[53] The evidence for the advance at a run is gathered in Pritchett 1985, 72–73. For the resulting loss of order, see Hanson 1989, 140–146, 150; Goldsworthy 1997, 7–8, 14–15; Debidour 2002, 45; Rawlings 2007, 95; 2013, 21; Matthew 2012, 199–202; Krentz 2013a, 141.

Thucydides' statement reveals that it was hard enough for most hoplites to maintain their formation while simply moving forward, let alone manoeuvring or charging. Even the well-trained and Spartan-led phalanx of the Ten Thousand struggled to keep its ranks during the pursuit at Kounaxa (Xen. *An.* 1.8.19).[56] Only one force free of Spartan involvement ever displayed a similar level of tactical cohesion while moving at speed. In 366, in a bid to dislodge a Sikyonian garrison in its territory, a unit of picked Phleiasian hoplites charged a fortress, 'running as fast as they could in formation' (κατὰ κράτος ἔθεον ὡς δυνατὸν ἐν τάξει, Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.22) and catching the occupants off guard. The picked force's small size and years of combat experience explain its unusual ability to run without falling into disorder.[57] Similarly, Spartan or Spartan-led troops appear to have been unique in their ability to withdraw from battle in some semblance of order (Thuc. 3.108.3; *Hell. Oxy.* 1.1).[58]

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[54] Simon Hornblower has pointed out to me that the negation ('not for the sake of the god') is oddly specific. Perhaps Thucydides expected his readers to have the Spartan reputation for piety in mind, or perhaps he hoped to forestall an apparently obvious assumption regarding the purpose of music. Either way, the negation nicely brings out Thucydides' point, namely that the Spartans fielded pipers purely for practical reasons, which might escape his readers if he neglected to spell it out.

[55] The attention paid by other authors to the prominence of flute players in Spartan society further suggests that their role in Spartan warfare was unusual (Hdt. 6.60; Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 13.7; Cartledge 1977, 16 n. 43). The presence of an *aulos* player in a battle scene on the Chigi vase, dated to the mid-seventh century, has been variously interpreted. Considering the many reasons to doubt the value of this vase as evidence for the existence of the phalanx at this early date, I am inclined to follow Van Wees (2000, 139), who argued that the musician is not part of any formation or tactic, but is simply calling for reinforcements.

[56] Over time, they seem to have developed the ability to keep their formation while running; they are seen doing so later in Armenia (Xen. *An.* 4.3.29).

[57] Contrast the newly raised Syracusan picked force assaulting Epipolai in 414, whose long charge threw their formation into chaos long before they reached their Athenian enemies (Thuc. 6.97.3–4).

[58] Contrast the Athenian army at Delion, 'scattering in retreat' (Pl. *Sym.* 221a), fleeing 'wherever they had any hope of safety' (Thuc. 4.96.7).

Even during the march to battle, there is little evidence that the typical hoplite militia held to any kind of formation. Xenophon may have revelled in the sight of a well-ordered army of hoplites, horsemen and light troops on the march (*Oik.* 8.6–7), but he also describes its opposite—a confused throng (*Oik.* 8.4), with ‘men getting in each other’s way like a crowd leaving a theatre’ (*Hipparch.* 2.7). He has Ischomachos point out that it was best to traverse enemy territory in battle formation, but that ‘knowing this, there are those who do it, and those who do not do it’ (*Oik.* 20.7). The different attitudes to discipline and drill in Sparta and Athens outlined above suggest that it is the military practices of these two states that are being contrasted here; elsewhere in Xenophon’s work, the Spartan king Agesilaos serves as the best example of how to conduct an army through hostile ground (*Ag.* 2.2–5, 6.7; *Hell.* 6.5.18–19). Aineias the Tactician confirms the ideal of hoplites advancing in formation (16.7), but his advice to rely on picked troops for the city’s defence suggests he had little faith in the ability and dependability of the hoplite levy.[59] The only time we actually see a non-Spartan hoplite force preserving its formation while moving is during the final retreat from Syracuse, when the Athenian army marched in a hollow square (Thuc. 7.78.2). Earlier on, the Athenians formed such a formation with their reserve during the first battle at Syracuse (Thuc. 6.67.1), but it did not move; despite the many battles they went on to fight, it is only in the last stage of the campaign that their army is shown marching in a predetermined order. Their prolonged service in increasingly desperate circumstances must have provoked an unusual sense of the importance of order and discipline. Even so, when the thirsty and exhausted remnants of the army reached the Assinaros, ‘all order was at an end’ (Thuc. 7.84.3). There is nothing else in the historical accounts to suggest that marching in formation was the common practice of ordinary hoplite militias. When our sources do not specify that an army moved in formation, it is justifiable to assume that they did not.

In short, all sources describing Greek military practice confirm that, throughout the Classical period, citizen levies remained unfamiliar with unit drill and incapable of manoeuvre. The fighting method of ordinary hoplites did not require such drill, and we have neither evidence nor reason to suggest it existed. Only the Spartans, raised to follow orders, had moved slightly beyond the simple expedient of forming a long line of troops; to Plutarch, their mere ability to retain a formation was enough to declare them ‘of all men the most outstanding craftsmen and masters of war’ (πάντων ἄκροι τεχνῖται καὶ σοφισταὶ τῶν πολεμικῶν, *Pel.* 23.3). As I will show in Chapter 5, the Spartans' basic system of formation drill and the tactical possibilities it offered does much to explain their edge in battle.

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[59] For more on tactical thought related to picked troops, see Chapter 5 below.

## Skill at Arms

The matter of weapons training is more complex. On the one hand, in the context of a dialogue on the merits of physical fitness, Xenophon states outright that 'the city does not publicly train for war' (*Mem.* 3.12.5). No evidence exists to contradict him, whether in Athens or elsewhere in the Greek world. On the other hand, unlike formation drill, weapon proficiency could be practiced individually and in private, meaning that a lack of state-sanctioned training does not necessarily imply an untrained militia. In addition, there is the possibility—discussed below—that communal activities like dancing may have contributed to citizens' preparedness for war.

The first question we should be asking, however, is whether the Greeks thought weapons training was necessary at all. Some modern scholars have argued that, at least in the case of hoplites, they did not; they thought of close combat as a natural act that required no special skill.[60] Becoming a hoplite was simply a matter of dressing up as one. The uses of shield and spear were matters of pure instinct, so there was little value in trying to make men better at it.

The main evidence cited in support of this view is a scene in Xenophon's *Kyroupaideia*, in which Kyros re-equips his light-armed poor. He gives them swords, wicker shields, and breastplates, in order to make them more effective against an army that vastly outnumbers his own. To forestall their possible misgivings, he tells them that this change in equipment will remove all the differences between the poor and the nobles that derive from the latter's leisure to train (*Kyr.* 2.1.9–19). The nobles might be better archers and javelin throwers, he says, but as swordsmen 'how could any of us have an advantage over another except in courage?' This line, of course, is meant only to invoke the troops' desire to prove themselves. The implication that close combat involved no skill should not be taken too seriously.[61] However, later on in the story, one of the men recently re-armed as heavy infantry delivers a long speech explaining how natural his new role feels; he starts out by repeating Kyros' argument that the rearmament is a great equaliser, but he goes on to stress at some length that being a swordsman requires nothing more than having a sword.

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[60] Anderson 1970, 84–85; Hanson 1989, 31–32; Van Wees 2004, 91.

[61] Krentz 1985b, 57.

> μάχαιράν γε μὴν εὐθὺς παιδίον ὢν ἥρπαζον ὅπου ἴδοιμι, οὐδὲ παρ’ ἑνὸς οὐδὲ τοῦτο μαθὼν ὅπως δεῖ λαμβάνειν ἢ παρὰ τῆς φύσεως, ὡς ἐγώ φημι. ἐποίουν γοῦν καὶ τοῦτο κωλυόμενος (…) καὶ ναὶ μὰ Δία ἔπαιόν γε τῇ μαχαίρᾳ πᾶν ὅ τι δυναίμην λανθάνειν. οὐ γὰρ μόνον φύσει ἦν, ὥσπερ τὸ βαδίζειν καὶ τρέχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡδὺ πρὸς τῷ πεφυκέναι τοῦτο ἐδόκει μοι εἶναι. (…) αὕτη ἡ μάχη καταλείπεται, ἐν ᾗ προθυμίας μᾶλλον ἢ τέχνης ἔργον ἐστί …
>
> Even when I was a boy I used to snatch a *machaira* wherever I saw one, though I swear I had never learned from anyone even how to hold one except by instinct. And I used to do this even though they tried to stop me (…) By Zeus, I used to hack with a *machaira* at everything I could without being caught. For this was not only instinctive, like walking and running, but I thought it was fun as well as natural. (…) Since such a fight awaits us, which is more a matter of spirit than skill …
>
> XEN. *Kyr*. 2.3.10–11[62]

The fact that the upcoming fight is going to be decided by close combat is what gives the speaker good hopes for victory.

Scholars have been quite happy to regard this speech as a demonstration of Greek attitudes to hoplite fighting, with little to no acknowledgement of the fact that these men are not hoplites in the sense that we now use the term. Anderson dismissed their wicker shields and curved swords as ‘oriental fancy dress’ and carried on as if Xenophon were really talking about hoplites.[63] Others seem to have assumed that all heavy infantry is essentially the same, and that the actual weapon used is irrelevant.[64] But it is clearly very relevant here—unless we can imagine a Greek child wandering around his parents’ house poking things with a spear more than two meters long. The whole point of the scene is to show that *the sword* is a weapon that men instinctively know how to use. The shields the troops are given are not hoplite shields either: Xenophon repeatedly refers to them as *gerra* rather than *aspides*. Indeed, the speaker claims that the use of his new shield is just an extension of his instinct to throw out his hands to deflect a blow; it is difficult to picture the bulky double-grip *aspis* being wielded in this way. Despite his familiarity with both Greek and

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[62] The full speech covers Xen. *Kyr*. 2.3.8–15. I have left the word *machaira* untranslated to emphasise that it indicates a particular kind of sword—a recurve sabre—which is useless for parrying and thrusting, but extremely effective as a crude slashing weapon (see Xen. *Hipp*. 12.11; Schwartz 2009, 94–95).

[63] Anderson 1970, 84.

[64] See for example Hunt 1998, 195.

Near Eastern heavy infantry, Xenophon deliberately chose to describe a warrior type in this passage that was entirely without parallel in his own world.[65] The swordsmen of Kyros are his invention. If Christesen is right to argue that the *Kyroupaideia* partly served as a suggested programme of military reform at Sparta, we should consider the possibility that Xenophon genuinely meant for the helots to be turned into swordsmen—precisely because it would require less effort to train them. The fact that later on in the story these imaginary warriors are unable to hold their own in battle against a deep formation of heavily-armed Egyptian pikemen (*Kyr.* 7.1.33–34) shows that Xenophon was neither presenting nor idealising a *generic* infantry type.

The rearmament scenes in the *Kyroupaideia* therefore express no more than a general sense that close combat produced better results with less training than other fighting styles. Whether this attitude should count as a demonstration of hoplite ideology is open to question.[66] Xenophon's description of a fictional warrior type may in fact be a careful attempt to avoid the claim that any man can be a hoplite without any need to train. After all, his ultimate point is to persuade us of the opposite; as we have seen, he takes great care to describe the new infantry's formation drill in detail, and to emphasise the value of that drill at every point. Far from dismissing weapons training as unnecessary, he may have simply regarded it as less important than unit drill for massed heavy infantry. His advice is therefore that the initial focus should be on the latter only.

What other sources support the notion that weapon proficiency was considered unimportant? Some passages suggest that hoplite training did not involve the use of weapons—a revealing indication of Greek attitudes to skill at arms. No part of the Spartan exercise regime described by Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 12.5–6) includes practice with sword or spear; instead it is focused entirely on increasing the stamina and the outward dignity of the troops.[67] When Agesilaos encouraged his army to train for his campaign against Persia, offering rewards to the best troops of each type, his archers and peltasts all strived to be the finest shots, but his hoplites competed only to see 'who had the best body' (ἥτις ἄριστα σωμάτων ἔχοι, Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16).[68] We hear of other armies, too, occupying themselves with gymnastic contests in lieu of any kind of actual weapons training.[69] The word Xenophon uses to describe the training of the Athenian ephebes in the 350s is simply γυμνάζεσθαι, 'exercise' (*Poroi* 4.52).[70] Later tradition has it that the Thebans were better fighters because they spent their spare time in the gymnasion.[71] It seems even military experts did not think there was much skill involved in heavy infantry combat. Whatever there was to learn, the warriors would have picked up naturally in their youth; commanders could take it for granted that their men knew how to use their weapons. To work on their strength and stamina was enough.[72]

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[65] Christesen (2006, 63) claimed that Xenophon gave Kyros' troops 'standard Persian infantry weapons', but there is a critical difference: Persian footsoldiers, like hoplites, tended to be armed with spears.

[66] Hunt (1998, 195) suggested that Xenophon was trying to revive the moral ideal that hoplite service was the duty of every citizen (and that the army of every polis was therefore by necessity made up of amateurs). However, this theory, too, fails to account for the fact that Kyros' new infantry are not hoplites.

[67] Hodkinson 2006, 139. Plato (*Laches* 182e–183a) claims the Spartans deliberately 'overlooked' weapons drill.

If this was indeed all it took to make good hoplites, we might expect even a militia army to have been a force to be reckoned with. Modern scholars are fond of exalting the physical fitness of hard-working Greek farmer-hoplites.[73] However, this notion has to contend with Xenophon's repeated complaint that citizen levies were mostly unfit for service:

> … τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῶν πόλεων στρατεύματα τοὺς μὲν προεληλυθότας ἤδη ταῖς ἡλικίαις ἔχει, τοὺς δ᾽ οὔπω ἀκμάζοντας: σωμασκοῦσί γε μὴν μάλα ὀλίγοι τινὲς ἐν ἑκάστῃ πόλει …
>
> … armies levied from cities include men who are already advanced in years and others who have not yet reached their prime. And in every city very few men train their bodies …
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 6.1.5[74]

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[68] 'Having good bodies' is the apparent result of hoplite training again at Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.17 and Diod. 16.44.6.

[69] Thuc. 5.80.3; Xen. *An.* 1.2.10, 4.8.25–28, 5.5.5. Xenophon (*Kyr.* 1.2.18) encourages the practice.

[70] This description stands in stark contrast to the mandatory *ephebeia* of the 330s, in which specialists taught 'fighting in armour and archery and javelin throwing and firing catapults' (ὁπλομαχεῖν καὶ τοξεύειν καὶ ἀκοντίζειν καὶ καταπάλτην ἀφιέναι, [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 42.3).

[71] Diod. 12.70.3, 15.39.2, 15.50.5, 15.87.1, 17.11.4; Plut. *Mor.* 639f–640a. The Spartans are said to have gone one better, and not even practiced wrestling, 'so that rivalry would not be in skill, but in courage' (Plut. *Mor.* 233e).

[72] Xen. *Mem.* 3.12.1–5; Ridley 1979, 538–545; Ducrey 1985, 69–72; Wheeler 1982, 223; Van Wees 2004, 89, 92; Tritle 2007b, 209; Hunt 2007, 133.

[73] See for example Hanson 1995, 264–265; Krentz 2010, 62; Hale 2013, 190. The notion appears to be disputed by Schwartz (2009, 98–101).

[74] See also Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.15.

It may be countered that the second part of this complaint was mainly targeted at the rich, whose leisured existence made them far less accustomed to hard work and exposure to the elements than the average citizen. Indeed, Xenophon elsewhere stresses that farm work increases a man's strength and endurance (*Oik.* 5.4–5, 5.8), while Plato explicitly contrasts the pudgy, useless upper classes with the wiry poor who stood by their side in the phalanx (*Pol.* 556c–e). Yet this is not the most straightforward reading of Xenophon's complaint. Unlike Plato, Xenophon here does not openly accuse a particular class of being out of shape, but merely points out that much of the militia is either too young or too old to fight. His claim that the rest do not train seems similarly levelled against the whole of the citizen body. Apparently, merely being used to hard work was not enough. Even those who saw skill at arms primarily as a matter of physical fitness believed that such fitness could only be acquired through constant practice at sports such as running and wrestling, as well as a carefully managed diet—to which, without compulsion, few would care to submit.[75] Indeed, such a training regime would require a prohibitive investment of time and money; scholars have rightly stressed that a properly balanced and supervised fitness programme would only have been available to the very rich.[76] Only the leisure class, then, had any hope of acquiring the 'best body' for military service.[77]

Clearly, even if training was only fitness, we should not overestimate a Greek levy's readiness for war. More importantly, though, some authors disagreed with the premise itself. They recognised that a man needed more than strength and courage to be a good warrior. In his description of the battle of the Krimesos, Plutarch directly contradicts Xenophon's optimistic claim that swordfighting was a matter of spirit rather than skill:

> ἐπεὶ δὲ εἰς ξίφη συνῆλθεν ὁ ἀγών καί τέχνης οὐχ ἧττον ἢ ῥώμης ἐγεγόνει τὸ ἔργον …
>
> But when the struggle came to swords, and the work required skill no less than strength …
>
> PLUT. *Tim.* 28.1

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[75] Pl. *Pol.* 404a–b, 416d; *Laws* 832e–833a; Xen. *Kyr.* 1.6.17–18. Xenophon openly laments (*Mem.* 3.5.15) that the Athenians—by which he presumably means all those who could afford hoplite equipment—refuse to adopt the Spartan training regime, including its many dietary restrictions (see *Lak.Pol.* 2.5–6, 5.3, 5.8–9).

[76] Müller 1995, 143, 161; Golden 1998, 27; Rawlings 2000, 243; and especially Pritchard 2013, 34–83, 209–210.

[77] Van Wees 2004, 55; 2007, 279.

Aristotle declares that mercenaries are 'like armed men fighting unarmed men, or athletes fighting amateurs', because, unlike militia, they know how to use their weapons (*Nik. Eth.* 1116b.7–8).[78] He does not differentiate between types of troops on this point; apparently, he thought training and experience to be of obvious value for every fighting style, including that of the hoplite. In his description of the ideal state, Plato offers an even more blunt critique of the amateurism of citizen warriors, in order to demonstrate the need for a professional army:

> καὶ ἀσπίδα μὲν λαβὼν ἤ τι ἄλλο τῶν πολεμικῶν ὅπλων τε καὶ ὀργάνων αὐθημερὸν ὁπλιτικῆς ἤ τινος ἄλλης μάχης τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον ἱκανὸς ἔσται ἀγωνιστής, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ὀργάνων οὐδὲν οὐδένα δημιουργὸν οὐδὲ ἀθλητὴν ληφθὲν ποιήσει …
>
> Does a man who picks up a shield or any other equipment or tool of war instantly become a competent fighter in heavy armour or in one of the other kinds of combat practised in war, even though no other tool will make anyone a craftsman or an athlete when it is picked up?
>
> PL. *Pol.* 374d[79]

He reinforces this point elsewhere in a discussion of the lifestyle of women. In Sparta, he says, women exercise just like men, but they play no part in war; by consequence, even in a crisis, 'they will not be able to use a bow, like the Amazons, or use any other missile with skill; nor could they pick up shield and spear' (*Laws* 806a–b). Despite the speech he puts in the mouth of his re-equipped Persian swordsman, Xenophon still makes Kyros' noblemen train with sword and shield to prepare themselves for the rigours of close combat (*Kyr.* 2.1.21, 3.3.9).

These passages show that the Greeks recognised a clear difference between general exercise and the specific training needed for battle. Indeed, there were those who saw an intensive athletic training regime as outright harmful for a warrior; it involved too much eating, too much sleeping, and too much focus on raw strength. Combat required agility more than strength, and campaigning required a willingness to go without food, drink or sleep for extended periods of time. From this point of view, those with 'the best body' might actually be the worst warriors.[80] As Golden put it, the link between athletics and military training was at best 'indirect and oblique'; at worst, gymnastic exercise and its focus on individual prowess could be seen as 'a reaction against the dominant form of war rather than a preparation for it.'[81]

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[78] On the superior physical and martial qualities of mercenaries, see Bettalli 2013, 403–404, 430–432.

[79] See also Pl. *Laws* 829e–830c.

It is clear that only certain forms of athletic training could be regarded as valuable preparation for war, and that even these approved types of exercise would only take a man part of the way. How, then, was a citizen to acquire the specific skills necessary to be a good fighter?

Plato himself suggests that certain forms of dance would help (*Laws* 814e–815a),[82] and modern scholars have posited that frequent practice in dances with martial overtones would have taught Greek hoplites all they needed to know.[83] The *pyrrichē*, in particular, was performed fully armed, with shield and spear in hand; it undeniably had some connection to military practice. Xenophon (*An.* 6.1.5–12) describes similar dances of various types and origins—some individual, some performed in groups.

However, while the *pyrrichē* may have stimulated a man's reflexes and agility, it hardly seems to have been appropriate training for the conditions of hoplite combat. Plato's version involved rhythmic leaping and dodging, as if the dancer was being pelted with javelins or stones—which may have been a common part of the hoplite battle experience—but it also featured motions that resembled 'launching arrows and javelins and blows of all kinds' (*Laws* 815a).[84] Such a dance would amount to either a very broad military training more suited to Homeric heroes, or a specific training intended for light-armed troops. It is perhaps no coincidence that the first of the war dances described by Xenophon is performed by Thracians armed with *machairai*, and that several of the other dancers also carry light shields rather than heavy hoplite equipment, including the woman dancing the *pyrrichē* (*An.* 6.1.5, 9, 12). This is significant if we are to assume that such dances—versions of the *pyrrichē* in particular—were intended to train hoplites. In fact, only one of the dances mentioned by Xenophon, the one unique to the Arkadians, actually resembles heavy infantry drill. Centuries later, Plutarch argued that a hoplite could prepare specifically for hand-to-hand fighting by practicing boxing, wrestling and running (*Mor.* 639d–640a); in his discussion we find no mention of dances like the *pyrrichē*. Indeed, Plato himself claims that, of all kinds of motion, *wrestling* was most like fighting in war (*Laws* 814d).

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[80] Xen. *Sym.* 2.17; Arist. *Pol.* 1338b.9–11; Plut. *Phil.* 3.2–4; Nepos 15.2.4–5; Plut. *Mor.* 192c–d; Pritchett 1974, 215–217, 219. For earlier examples of this attitude, see Pleket 1998, 319–320; Rawlings 2000, 242 n. 43; Van Wees 2004, 92.

[81] Golden 1998, 28 (where the 'dominant form of war' refers to fighting in large homogenous units). See also Müller 1995, 143; Van Wees 2004, 92; Whitby 2004, 224.

[82] Later sources in a similar vein are gathered in Wheeler 1982, 223.

[83] Borthwick 1969, 386, 390; Ridley 1979, 545–547; Rawlings 2000, 248–249.

[84] See also Eur. *Andr.* 1129–1136; Philostr. *Gym.* 19.

Greek war dances, then, had little to do with military training, at least for hoplites. For light-armed troops, who certainly had to spend time training in order to use their weapons effectively, they would be a complementary exercise at best. In any case, as Wheeler has pointed out, 'the value of such armed dances as practical military training should not be taken too seriously'—the dances were primarily an entertaining display, practiced by no more than a small minority of the citizen levy.[85]

The alternative was actual weapons training. Müller has rightly noted that the ideal system of physical training prescribed by Plato is not a general athletic programme or a dance recital, but a set of specifically *military* exercises.[86] Plato apparently saw this as a more effective way to turn citizens into capable fighters. Indeed, he advocates the abolition of combat sports like wrestling and boxing altogether, to be replaced by 'fighting in armour' (τὴν ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις μάχην), singly or in groups (*Laws* 833d–e). He advises that children should learn horse riding, archery, and the use of the javelin and the sling from the age of six; that both men and women should be taught 'all the military exercises', including the fighting styles of peltasts, hoplites and cavalry; and that they should participate in tactical drills and sham battles on a regular basis.[87] In his *Politeia*, he repeatedly refers to the products of such a training regime as ἀθληταὶ πολέμου, 'athletes of war' (416d, 422b, 521d, 543b)—not referring to the notion of sport as military training, but building on his image, cited above, of professional soldiers as expert craftsmen or athletes. These athletes, he claims, would have a field day fighting the amateur 'fat rich men' who made up the armies of rival states; 'in fact it will be easy for our athletes to fight two or three times their number' (*Pol.* 422a–c). A stronger endorsement of weapons training seems difficult to imagine.

This final passage, however, reveals the gap between ideal and reality. Like Xenophon, Plato takes it entirely for granted that the militia of 'rich city-states' would consist of untrained, physically unfit men. The parallel shows that this is no transparent attempt on Plato's part to glorify his proposed methods; those who saw the value of training clearly agreed that the average Greek paid far too little attention to it. Aristotle describes what must have inspired Plato's idealistic vision:

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[85] Wheeler 1982, 230–232; see also Anderson 1991, 29–30; Hodkinson 2006, 136–137. Ceccarelli has further noted (1998, 18–19) that the link between dancing and warfare was neither specific nor exclusive; dances in arms could serve any number of symbolic purposes.

[86] Müller 1995, 159–161.

[87] Pl. *Laws* 794c, 813d–814b, 829a–831a; Jouanna (2015, 38–39) has stressed the remarkable level of detail of Plato's proposed training programme.

> ἔτι δ᾽ αὐτοὺς τοὺς Λάκωνας ἴσμεν, ἕως μὲν αὐτοὶ προσήδρευον ταῖς φιλοπονίαις, ὑπερέχοντας τῶν ἄλλων, νῦν δὲ κἀν τοῖς γυμνικοῖς ἀγῶσι κἀν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς λειπομένους ἑτέρων: οὐ γὰρ τῷ τοὺς νέους γυμνάζειν τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον διέφερον, ἀλλὰ μόνον τῷ πρὸς μὴ ἀσκοῦντας ἀσκεῖν. (…) ἀνταγωνιστὰς γὰρ τῆς παιδείας νῦν ἔχουσι, πρότερον δ᾽ οὐκ εἶχον.
>
> And we know of the Lakonians that while they persisted by themselves in their hard exercises they surpassed all others, but now they are left behind by the rest both in gymnastic and in military contests; for they used to stand out, not because they exercised their young men like this, but only because they trained and others did not. (…) They have rivals in their education now, while they had none before.
>
> ARIST. *Pol.* 1338b.24–39

At the time Aristotle wrote this, Athens had finally adopted a universal military training programme for male citizens.[88] Before the 330s, such a mandatory programme did not exist in any Greek state; the Spartans, therefore, were the only 'athletes of war', and their superiority was widely acknowledged (Isok. 6.48, 81; 7.7). When Xenophon sums up the religious rituals the Spartans observed on campaign, he draws the same parallel as Plato, and the tone of his treatise suggests that he would happily have extended his assessment to their military methods in general: 'all others are mere improvisers in soldiering; the Lakedaimonians are the only craftsmen of war' (*Lak. Pol.* 13.5).

By the end of the fifth century it seems the Greeks were becoming increasingly aware of this problem, for it is around this time that *hoplomachoi* first appear on the scene. These men were essentially sophists, travelling teachers-for-hire, who specialised in war.[89] They taught mainly weapons drill and unit deployment. Any man of means who wished to receive military training could hire one of these *hoplomachoi*, probably at considerable expense, to provide such training on an individual basis. In his *Laches* (181e–182d), Plato has Nikias promote their activities: weapons drill is good exercise, he argues, and in battle those who have learned it 'will have the advantage everywhere'. In addition, it will increase their valour and encourage their desire to learn about tactics and generalship as well.

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[88] Indeed, Aristotle or his pupil is our source for the nature of this programme: see [Arist.] *Ath.Pol.* 42.3–5.

[89] Wheeler 1983, 224; 1983, 4; Van Wees 2004, 90.

The instruction offered by *hoplomachoi* to the few rich men who cared for it would not have made a dent in the overall amateurism of the hoplite militia.[90] More interestingly, though, even the most enthusiastic advocates of military training were not keen on the *hoplomachoi*. Xenophon, for one, was clearly hostile to them. We have seen how he berates them in passing for their failure to understand Spartan methods. In the *Anabasis* he presents a *hoplomachos* called Phalinos, who 'claimed to know all about deployment and fighting in armour' (προσεποιεῖτο ἐπιστήμων εἶναι τῶν ἀμφὶ τάξεις τε καὶ ὁπλομαχίαν, *An.* 2.1.7), and now served as a faithful emissary to his treacherous Persian employer. The intent of the phrase is clearly to call his supposed expertise into question.[91] Elsewhere, he devotes a brief Sokratic dialogue (*Mem.* 3.1) to the deconstruction and dismissal of the teachings of the *hoplomachos* Dionysodoros. This man taught only the drawing up of troops, which Xenophon insists is not only insufficient, but useless on its own; the conversation ends with Sokrates sending his companion back to demand that Dionysodoros teach him the rest.

Where did this negative attitude come from? Plato puts a speech against *hoplomachia* in the mouth of the general Laches, but it hardly answers our question; as Emlyn-Jones has noted, Laches' rhetoric may be compelling, but his arguments are not very strong.[92] Laches' main point is that the *hoplomachoi* are not welcome in Sparta, even though the Spartans are more concerned than any other Greeks to learn everything they can about war; since the Spartans do not care for *hoplomachia*, it must be a worthless thing. Yet if the *hoplomachoi* really regarded Sparta as 'inviolable, holy ground', as Laches says (*Laches* 183b), the obvious explanation is that Sparta was the only place that produced drillmasters of its own, and had no need of experts from elsewhere.[93] Laches is made to stress that the *hoplomachoi* would rather go to any people but the Spartans, 'especially to those who would themselves admit that they are inferior to many in military affairs' (*Laches* 183b). How else would these sophists make a living? Laches' other argument, that he once saw a *hoplomachos* make a fool out of himself with an impractical weapon of his own devising, also falls short of explaining why a tactical innovator like Xenophon would have a problem with these instructors.

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[90] Rawlings 2000, 243.

[91] The verb προσποιέω often implies an intent to deceive, as at Xen. *An.* 4.3.20, where it is used to describe a feint. Jouanna (2015, 34 n. 14) translates the line as 'he pretended to know'. As he points out, this passage is the earliest instance of the word *hoplomachia* in Greek.

[92] Pl. *Laches* 182d–184c; Emlyn-Jones 1996, 69.

[93] Wheeler 1983, 13.

Frustratingly, Plato himself does not take a side in this debate on the merits of weapons drill; after Laches' speech, he has Sokrates take over the conversation and turn it into a broader examination of the nature of courage. We are left wondering whether it is Nikias or Laches who represents the views of his fellow citizens.[94] But even if we assume they both do—that Laches stands for tradition and conservatism while Nikias shows an innovative and practical perspective—neither view explains why Xenophon, a fourth-century veteran and military thinker strongly in favour of drill of every kind, would nonetheless look on the *hoplomachoi* with disdain. Indeed, why does Plato, who clearly favoured intensive military training, fail to endorse such training here?

A possible answer lies in the way both Xenophon and Plato would like the military training of the citizen body to be organised. Xenophon mainly advocates the adoption of the Spartan system—the constant training of all male citizens by specially selected male citizens, all striving to attain good health and military excellence for the sake of the community.[95] Similarly, when Plato describes the training system he would like to introduce—which explicitly includes *hoplomachia*—he stresses that 'for all these things there should be public teachers who get their pay from the city', carefully selected by the powers that be (*Laws* 813c–e). In both cases the system is meant to be state-sanctioned and collective, and the experts are supposed to come from within.

It seems, then, that these authors did not disapprove of the training offered by *hoplomachoi*, but of the men themselves; they saw them as buffoons and charlatans who took advantage of a known problem, travelling around and intruding on city-states' autonomy to sell their half-baked courses to the highest bidder. As Whitehead has pointed out, both authors are especially critical of the lack of practical experience of the *hoplomachoi*.[96] These men could not provide what the militia needed—a comprehensive, systematic training system that would raise their fighting abilities to a higher standard.[97] Unsurprisingly, when the Athenians eventually did adopt such a system, its instructors were not *hoplomachoi*, but teachers (διδασκάλοι) publicly elected for the job ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 42.3).[98]

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[94] Anderson 1970, 86; Ridley 1979, 528; Vidal-Naquet 1986, 95; Van Wees 2004, 90–91. In the *Euthydemos*, Plato has Sokrates engage a pair of *hoplomachoi* directly (one of whom is Dionysodoros, the same instructor found in Xen. *Mem.* 3.1: see Whitehead 1990, 34–35). However, their military skills are mentioned only briefly at the start of the dialogue (271c–272a, 273c–d). Once it becomes clear that the two are also sophists in a broader sense, the discussion immediately shifts to the subject of virtue.

[95] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* throughout; see also *Mem.* 3.5.15–16.

[96] Whitehead 1990, 35.

A final important obstacle to weapons training is highlighted in the *Laches*. The anecdote about the bumbling *hoplomachos* and his makeshift weapon may not have swayed Laches' listeners, but it is symptomatic of a pattern in Greek discussions of military exercise, and probably formed a significant part of the attitude that Plato meant to evoke with the character. Simply put, the Greeks seem to have found military training ridiculous. We have seen that Xenophon was aware of the comedic potential of formation drill; elsewhere, however, he complains that citizens not only neglect their own training, but 'laugh at those who make an effort' (*Mem.* 3.5.15). Plato was similarly concerned that the exercises he proposed 'would seem laughable to some' (*Laws* 830d). Indeed, Laches is made to say that those who learn *hoplomachia* 'cannot avoid becoming a laughing stock', because all others would constantly be on watch for the slightest slip-up of these self-proclaimed experts (*Laches* 184c). We do not know if this attitude was derived from old ideals about the proper pursuits of the leisured gentleman,[99] or whether it was simply a way for the militia to gloss over their own lack of opportunity or willingness to train,[100] but the point is clear: Greek citizens institutionalised their scorn for the notion of martial skill and professional preparation for war. Those who bothered were deemed to be trying too hard. The consequence of this social stigma cannot be emphasised enough: to avoid the ridicule of one's fellow citizens, *it was better to remain untrained.*

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[97] Wheeler (1983, 2–3) argued that they *could*, and therefore concluded that there was no solution to the contradiction in the works of Xenophon and Plato. If we bear in mind, however, that both authors envisioned alternative training programmes without the interference of *hoplomachoi*, the contradiction disappears.

[98] This is the very same word Plato uses for his public drillmasters (*Laws* 813e). It should be noted, however, that not all of Athens' attested *didaskaloi* were Athenian citizens (see Reinmuth 1971, 124).

[99] Van Wees 2007, 279–280.

[100] Christ (2006, 96) stressed the negative effect of Sokrates' displays of endurance on the morale of the Athenians during the siege of Potidaia; his superhuman indifference to cold and hunger was taken as a show of contempt. Individuals who trained for war, too, had the potential to make others look bad by comparison. In such cases, it was always easier to pour scorn on the outlier than to follow suit.

In short, a set of obstructive attitudes ensured that few if any Greek citizens were trained to use their weapons. Actual weapon proficiency may have been popularly regarded as useless, while its poor substitute—athletic training—was only available to the wealthy few. Those who wished to introduce weapons training had to confront its reputation of being a ridiculous and needlessly strenuous waste of time. Even the Spartans seem to have held to the belief that only strength, stamina and courage really mattered—but they could at least couple their generic exercises to the basic formation drill they imposed on their troops on campaign. Among other Greeks, the belief that skill at arms was unnecessary took away the only form of training they were able to provide for themselves. Voices were increasingly raised in favour of combat training for all citizens, but until the end of the Classical period these seem to have fallen on deaf ears.[101] The result was a militia army which was, by all accounts, perhaps partly composed of tough men, but mostly unready for war.

⁂

The Greeks' entrenched military amateurism was fundamental to entire their way of war. Its centrality to their military thought and practice cannot be stressed enough—firstly because it is one of the aspects of Classical Greek warfare that is furthest removed from our own contemporary assumptions, and secondly because it must affect our analysis of every aspect of the subject. Much as they may have liked to, non-Spartan commanders did not possess troops of anything near a uniform standard of fitness or individual training, and they could not rely on their forces to carry out any but the simplest of tactical plans. Moreover, the militia's contempt for and outright hostility to training and military discipline made it all but impossible to do anything to correct these shortcomings.

A few implications must be accepted. Firstly, in reconstructions of actual tactics and battles, it must at all times be assumed that the typical Greek citizen hoplite knew no weapons drill, no formation drill, and understood only the simplest of signals. Despite the modest advances apparently made by certain elite units or unusually experienced forces, this situation remained essentially unchanged right down to the end of the Classical period. Their initial deployment in a regular formation was perhaps the only thing distinguishing the hoplite militia from a heavily-armed mob. They had no officers to keep them in check, no pattern drills to cling to, and often no way to tell friend from foe. The mass levy of light-armed citizens was even less organised, and probably no better trained; even the skills of the cavalry depended entirely on the extent to which they bothered to practice. It is understandable, indeed perhaps to be expected, that such armies behaved unpredictably in battle, and that they were liable to inertia and panic both on and off the battlefield.

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[101] This was at least to some extent a matter of money: the state could not afford to pay its citizens to devote themselves to war (see Xen. *Poroi* 4.51–52).

Secondly, when we trace the development of tactical thought, we must bear in mind the restrictions imposed on it by the amateurism of Greek militias. As long as the typical Greek army remained a portion of the citizen population in arms, generals might dream of imitating Spartans or Persians, but they could never bring such dreams into practice. Those who sought solutions to imminent tactical problems had to work with the tools they were given. As we will see, many of the typical features of Greek warfare were defined by the limitations of the citizen levy, and by the persistent efforts of its commanders to rise above those limitations.

Finally, the emergence of treatises on military theory in the fourth century must be seen within this context as well. It has been noted that Greek military thinkers struggled against the realities of their world; they tried to find ways to improve the system from within, as Xenophon did, or simply to draw up a better one, as we see in the works of Plato. These works are often thought to represent a cynical new way of war that was the product of the brutal escalation of interstate conflict during the fourth century. In fact, it seems that these authors placed themselves firmly within the old world of polis warfare, and sought desperately to fix some of the problems they encountered.

## CHAPTER 3

# ‘The Finest, Flattest Piece of Land’: Where to Fight

### Traditions

For over a century, scholars have insisted that Greek hoplite armies of the Archaic and Classical period fought only on open, level ground, at a moment that had been agreed upon in advance. Given the central importance of this supposed custom in the traditional model of hoplite battle, it is somewhat surprising that it has hardly ever been subjected to detailed scrutiny. A number of recent works have discussed the subject in passing, usually to the detriment of the notion of fair and open battle.[1] Yet there has been no detailed characterisation of Greek thought and practice regarding the time and place of battle to rival the doctrine found in the Prussian model.

The doctrine in question is largely derived from a single passage in Herodotos. Indeed, this passage has long been cited as crucial evidence, not just for the nature of hoplite battle, but for the nature of Greek warfare as a whole.[2] When the Great King holds council to decide whether to punish the Greeks, Herodotos puts these words in the mouth of the prominent Persian Mardonios:

> καίτοι [γε] ἐώθασι Ἕλληνες, ὡς πυνθάνομαι, ἀβουλότατα πολέμους ἵστασθαι ὑπό τε ἀγνωμοσύνης καὶ σκαιότητος. ἐπεὰν γὰρ ἀλλήλοισι πόλεμον προείπωσι, ἐξευρόντες τὸ κάλλιστον χωρίον καὶ λειότατον, ἐς τοῦτο κατιόντες μάχονται, ὥστε σὺν κακῷ μεγάλῳ οἱ νικῶντες ἀπαλλάσσονται· περὶ δὲ τῶν ἑσσουμένων οὐδὲ λέγω ἀρχήν, ἐξώλεες γὰρ δὴ γίνονται.
>
> Yet the Greeks, I hear, do wage war, and they do so senselessly, in their poor judgment and stupidity. When they have declared war against each other, they find the finest, flattest piece of land and go down there and

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[1] Krentz 2002, 27–28; Van Wees 2004, 134–135; Rawlings 2007, 81–82; Wheeler 2007c, 188–191; Echeverría 2011, 48–54.

[2] See for example Martin 1887, 429; Detienne 1968, 124; Anderson 1970, 1; Lonis 1979, 15; Vidal-Naquet 1986, 89; Connor 1988, 18; Hanson 1989, 9–10; Lazenby 1991, 88; Dawson 1996, 47; Mitchell 1996, 91; Sage 1996, 73–74; Lendon 2005, 42; Bouvier 2006, 28–29; Rabe 2008, 5; Hanson 2013, 269; Ducrey 2015, 54.

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> fight, so that the victors come off with great harm—I will not even begin to speak of the defeated, for they are utterly destroyed.
>
> HDT. 7.9β.1

This speech appears neatly programmatic. The Greeks fought their battles on open ground, where neither side had an advantage; they decided their wars through such fair and bloody engagements. The question when and where the Greeks fought their battles seems redundant in light of this speech. Unfortunately, however, Mardonios' statements cannot simply be taken at face value.[3]

Since it is unlikely that Herodotos would have had any way of finding out what was said in Persian royal councils, we must assume that Mardonios' speech consists of what Herodotos assumed he might have said. Furthermore, we know that the statement about the death toll of Greek battles is inaccurate; it may reflect the *goal* of Greek battles, as we will see in Chapter 6, but it is a gross exaggeration of the casualty rates actually reported in the sources.[4] It has therefore been suggested that the speech is a deliberate caricature born out of Persian contempt for the clumsy Greek way of war.[5] Of course Mardonios would be the character of choice to express this view; both Herodotos and his audience knew that he, as commander of the Persians at Plataia, would eventually become the victim of his own arrogance.

This interpretation explains the exaggerations of the speech while leaving its description of the Greek approach to battle basically intact. But it is important to take the context of the statement into account. Mardonios is trying to get Xerxes to embark on a massive and difficult undertaking. The Persians' last campaign of conquest in Skythia did not go well, and Herodotos has other voices in the court urge a more cautious course. How could Mardonios persuade the Great King to commit to further expansion? Elsewhere in his work, we find Aristagoras trying to tempt the king of Sparta to invade Persia, and one of the crucial arguments he offers is that the Persians are of no consequence in war: weak, cowardly, easily overthrown (5.49.2). Wheeler has noted the similarity between the two episodes.[6] We may well be dealing with a deliberate parallel here—an ambitious aristocrat attempting to lure a monarch into an ill-advised venture by making it seem suspiciously easy.

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[3] Delbrück 1908, 129; Pelling 1991, 132; Krentz 1997, 60; 2000, 178; Van Wees 2004, 116; Dayton 2005, 52–55; Rawlings 2007, 64–65. For a more detailed version of the argument that follows, see Konijnendijk 2016.

[4] The evidence is gathered in Krentz 1985a, and discussed in Dayton 2005, 81–102.

[5] Detienne 1968, 124 n. 21; Lendon 2005, 42–43; Evans 2006, 124; Wheeler 2007c, 190–191; Moggi 2002, 197–198; Bouvier 2006, 33–34; Van Wees 2011, 99. Indeed, according to Herodotos himself (6.112.2), the Persians deemed the Greek charge at Marathon 'suicidally insane'. Alternatively, the passage has been regarded as a criticism of Greek in-fighting (Macan 1908a, 14; Forsdyke 2007, 235) or as a condemnation of war itself (Tritle 2007a, 173–174; Raaflaub 2011, 30).

Such a motif would certainly explain the odd things Mardonios is made to say. The Persian way of war relied heavily on the use of cavalry armed with missile weapons—a troop type that can only function on open plains, where it has room to manoeuvre.[7] It follows that the notion of seeking out the 'flattest piece of land' must have been familiar to the Persians. Herodotos himself says they landed at Marathon specifically because the ground there was suitable for horsemen (6.102). At Plataia they spent ten days trying to lure the Greeks down from their camp into the plain, where the Persians would have the advantage (9.41, 49–51). Some eighty years later, the Ten Thousand, trapped in the heart of the Persian Empire, breathed a sigh of relief when they reached hilly terrain; finally they would be free from the Persian cavalry pursuing them (Xen. *An.* 3.4.24).[8] In short, the Persians themselves seem to have loved to fight on the flattest piece of land, where their horsemen had the upper hand. So why would Mardonios present this habit as typically Greek—and why would he call it stupid?

If we bear in mind what he was trying to achieve, the answer becomes clear. Mardonios was trying to *persuade* Xerxes, not to inform him; his speech was tailored to that end. Several scholars have noted in passing that his arguments are carefully designed to play into Xerxes' hopes and assuage his fears.[9] Mardonios stresses that the Greeks would do better to find the most defensible positions in their land and fight from there, but that they fail to understand this, and foolishly fight in the plains. To Xerxes, this must have been excellent news. Sieges and operations in mountainous terrain are costly and time-consuming; open battle, on the other hand, was the Persians' forte, and would give them a chance to force the issue with a single decisive blow. Of all the pitched battles fought between Persian and Greek forces up to that time, the Persians had only lost one—and even that fight, at Marathon, had been a close call. The entire Greek centre had fled before the Greeks finally prevailed. Xerxes would have been fully confident of the abilities of his royal army. For the Greeks, to march down and meet the Persians in the open field would be proof of very poor judgment indeed. Here was an argument that might push the Great King to begin a great new war of conquest.[10]

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[6] Wheeler 2007, 191 n. 20.

[7] For modern assessments of the Persian land army, see Sekunda 1992; Head 1992; Lazenby 1993, 21–33; Lee 2008; Konijnendijk 2012, 7–10. Tuplin (2010, 178–182), however, has argued that the role of cavalry in the Persian tactical system should not be overstated.

[8] See also Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.5, 3.4.15; Krentz 2010, 103, 139, 143.

[9] Krentz 2000, 178; Tritle 2007a, 173; Trédé 2015, 6–7. None of these authors have elaborated on their observation, however; see now Konijnendijk 2016, 9–11.

Given this context, is it really safe to assume that Mardonios' speech describes the actual practice of late Archaic and early Classical Greek warfare? The link with Aristagoras' speech is particularly relevant here. If we compare Aristagoras' claims about bows and breeches to what we know of the Persian way of war, it is instantly clear how poor his characterisation is. He does not speak of the Persians' vast numbers on land and sea, does not acknowledge their eye for logistics and sieges, and completely fails to mention their war-winning horsemen. Herodotos reports these Persian strengths in detail elsewhere, but of course his conniving Milesian would say nothing of the sort in his attempt to persuade the king of Sparta. Mardonios' description of Greek warfare is of the same kind. It is an absurdly selective account driven entirely by its manipulative function: Herodotos makes Mardonios limit Greek warfare, with deliberate precision, to the kind of fight the Persians are likely to win. He does not mention how Greeks may defend cities tenaciously from the walls, how they may block passes and peninsulas and use the terrain to their advantage, or how they may refuse battle and forcibly prolong a campaign. These were the strategies they actually used in the course of the Persian Wars. Indeed, the decisive land battle of Xerxes' campaign was not fought on the plain, because, despite Mardonios' promises, the Greeks would not come down to it. As a result, the Persians at Plataia could not fully deploy their trump card, their flexible mounted force. Instead they were drawn into a heavy infantry engagement in the hills. They fought bravely and bitterly, but they lost in the end; their army was utterly destroyed.[11]

For the construction of a true picture of Greek tactical thought, it is important to stress the significance of this ironic Herodotean narrative. Rather than prove the existence of gentlemanly rules restricting Greek warfare, it reveals the Greeks' awareness—at least when the work was written, in the decades before the Peloponnesian War—of the existence of different tactical systems with specific strengths and weaknesses that could be played out to great effect. Some tactics and troop types offered a great advantage on particular kinds of ground. To win, one had to neutralise the enemy's advantage while maximising one's own. This principle was apparently so widely known that telling blatant lies about an opponent's way of war could become a recurrent trait of archetypal bad advisors.[12]

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[10] That is, if he could be persuaded. Artabanos, the next advisor to speak, dismisses Mardonios' appraisal of the Greeks as 'empty words' and 'nonsense' (Hdt. 7.10η). For the contrast between the two characters, see especially Lattimore 1939, 24, 31, and more recently Moggi 1994.

[11] The full account of the battle of Plataia may be found in Hdt. 9.19–70. Veith's brief treatment of the battle (in Kromayer/Veith 1931, 167–169) remains unsurpassed; for more detailed modern analyses see especially Lazenby 1993, 217–246, 249–255; Worley 1994, 56–58; Rusch 2011, 56–66; Konijnendijk 2012.

Outside of ill-fated Mardonios' speech, there is little evidence to support the notion of a standard Greek practice in the matter of choosing a battlefield. Scholars often cite the second-century testimony of Polybios to reinforce Herodotos' misleading claims:

> οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀρχαῖοι (…) τοὺς πολέμους ἀλλήλοις προύλεγον καὶ τὰς μάχας, ὅτε πρόθοιντο διακινδυνεύειν, καὶ τοὺς τόπους, εἰς οὓς μέλλοιεν ἐξιέναι παραταξόμενοι. νῦν δὲ καὶ φαύλου φασὶν εἶναι στρατηγοῦ τὸ προφανῶς τι πράττειν τῶν πολεμικῶν.
>
> The ancients (…) informed one another in advance of wars and battles when they intended to fight and of the places where they would go and deploy their army. But now they say it is a bad general who does anything openly in war.
>
> POLYB. 13.3.2–6[13]

Again, the statement seems plain enough by itself, but there are strong reasons for suspicion. Eckstein has argued that Polybios' work is driven by an overriding moral agenda, extolling traditional aristocratic values as a weapon against the growing influence on society and politics of such evil types as foreigners, mercenaries, commoners and tyrants.[14] Specifically, the passage above is a condemnation of Philip V, contemporary king of Macedon. Polybios deplored his military and political methods as a threat to old-fashioned order and virtue; his actions are therefore contrasted with the supposed practices of earlier, noble Greeks—or, quite possibly, with the altogether imagined practices of Philip's predecessors.[15] The use of trickery and deception does gain praise from

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[12] Raaflaub (2002, 24) has noted that Alkibiades' defence of the Sicilian Expedition is another example of the same trope.

[13] See for example Anderson 1970, 1; Osborne 1987, 144; Connor 1988, 19; Hanson 1989, 15; Mitchell 1996, 94; Hanson 2000, 204–205; Debidour 2002, 61; Bouvier 2006, 41–42.

[14] Eckstein 1995, especially 116–117.

[15] Krentz 2000, 178; Van Wees 2004, 115–116; Dayton 2005, 150–157.

Polybios when the trickster himself is a more admirable character, or when the victim is not Greek.[16] Indeed, Polybios himself notes that the Macedonian pike formation would be a far more effective weapon 'if there were any way to force the enemy to accommodate himself to the time and place of the phalanx' (18.31.3)—implying that this is not the reality of war, and explaining that any wise commander would of course avoid such a fight (18.31.4, 8–12).

Even so, could there be any truth to Polybios' description of the military methods of 'the ancients'? It is not clear which 'ancients' he is referring to, and they may in fact be fourth-century Macedonian kings; in any case, as Dayton put it, 'all accounts for all periods' refute the statements he makes.[17] The only known example of a battle prearranged by its participants is the famous Battle of the Champions, fought in the middle of the sixth century between Argos and Sparta (Hdt. 1.82).[18] The number of warriors was fixed at three hundred on each side; no others were allowed within marching distance of the battlefield, so that no one would be tempted to interfere. These restrictions seem to confirm Polybios' statement in every particular, and they must be its ultimate origin. However, as an experiment with limited war, the Battle of the Champions was a complete failure. Argos and Sparta could not agree over who had won; they ended up launching their armies into an all-out pitched battle anyway. A hundred years later, when the Argives offered their old enemies a chance for a second round, the Spartans are said to have scoffed at the very idea.[19]

There is no sign in the Classical sources of Polybios' 'giving notice' (προλέγω) of the time and place of battle. Certain fixed elements of a clash, such as the setting up of a trophy and the truce to recover the dead, are faithfully included in almost every battle description from the late fifth century onward, but there is never any mention of announcements to the enemy beforehand. The term μάχη ἐξ ὁμολόγου ('battle by mutual consent') is often used in this context, but it is in fact first found in Polybios himself.[20] Pritchett has offered some examples of Classical Greeks who are said to have 'challenged' (προεκαλοῦντο) their enemies to battle, but these are all reported by Diodoros, likely under the influence of the tropes of Hellenistic literature. Xenophon, describing the events of the same period, does not use the term.[21] In his work, at best, 'it was already clear that there would be a battle' (πρόδηλον ἤδη ἦν ὅτι μάχη ἔσοιτο, *Hell.* 6.4.9)—a description of a general mood that seems to presuppose that there would *not* be a formal announcement. Battles in Xenophon tend to begin when one side 'went forward' (ἐχώρουν, *Hell.* 2.4.11) or 'set forth to battle' (εἰς μάχην ὥρμησαν, *Hell.* 6.5.7) or a commander 'began to lead against the enemy' (ἤρξατο ἄγειν [...] πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους, *Hell.* 6.4.13), to name just some examples. There is no fixed phrase and no indication that the enemy has been informed beforehand. In battles against non-Greeks, similar verbs are used.[22]

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[16] See for example Polyb. 14.5.15; Eckstein 1995, 86–87.

[17] Dayton 2005, 148; see also Krentz 2000, 168–171 and 178; 2002, 27–29.

[18] Rawlings (2007, 65–66) doubts the historicity of this battle.

[19] Thuc. 5.41.3 (although they eventually accepted the terms of the treaty for other reasons); Van Wees 2004, 134; Dayton 2005, 48. At Plataia, Mardonios is said to have offered a similar challenge to the Spartans, which was also turned down (Hdt. 9.48).

[20] Pritchett 1974, 147; Hanson 1989, 4; Sage 1996, xvii; Wheeler 2007c, 203, 209, 212.

In short, the notion of a formal challenge or agreement is more than the contemporary sources allow. Wheeler's characterisation of the provocation to battle in a certain location as 'tacit' may be closer to the mark: 'one side "offered" battle to the other by deploying and awaiting the other's preparation.'[23] But how are we to interpret the fact that there was no common expression even for this tacit offer? The way Greeks reported wars apparently did not require it. The absence of a specific term could mean it was so obvious that it needed no elaboration, but it seems more likely that no term existed because Greek would expect battles to be announced in any way. Indeed, as we shall see, various ruses tried by the Greeks could never have worked if battles were normally fought by agreement—however tacit—and there is no sign in the sources that such ruses were the result of a flagrant disregard for convention. The phrasing in Xenophon suggests that a battle began when one side initiated it, regardless of whether the other side was aware of this or willing to follow suit.

There are sufficient internal and external grounds, then, to dismiss both Mardonios' and Polybios' sweeping statements about when and where Greek battles were fought. They are likely to have been phrased to suit particular agendas, and the extant accounts of relevant events do not bear them out. This calls one of the central elements of the traditional model of hoplite battle into question. The Prussians and their successors seem to have privileged certain apparently programmatic but actually misleading statements over a large array of contrary evidence. If we wish to establish what determined the Greeks' choice of a time and place for battle, we should turn to this evidence as a more reliable guide.

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[21] Pritchett 1974, 149–150, citing Diod. 13.73.1, 15.32.6, 15.65.4, 15.68.4.

[22] In the plain of Sardis, Agesilaos 'led (ἦγεν) his phalanx against the horsemen' (3.4.23). The battle of Kounaxa began when the Persians 'advanced evenly' (ὁμαλῶς προῄει) against Kyros' line (Xen. *An.* 1.8.14).

[23] Wheeler 2007c, 203; see also Connor 1988, 12; Van Wees 2004, 134; Echeverría 2011, 49.

## Practice

The earliest clash between Greek hoplite armies of which a detailed description survives is the battle of Olpai, fought in 426, five years into the Peloponnesian War. Of engagements before this time we often hear little more than that they were fought, and who won:

> Ἀθηναίοισι δὲ ἰδοῦσι τοὺς Βοιωτοὺς ἔδοξε πρότερον τοῖσι Βοιωτοῖσι ἢ τοῖσι Χαλκιδεῦσι ἐπιχειρέειν. συμβάλλουσί τε δὴ τοῖσι Βοιωτοῖσι οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι καὶ πολλῷ ἐκράτησαν, κάρτα δὲ πολλοὺς φονεύσαντες ἑπτακοσίους αὐτῶν ἐζώγρησαν.
>
> When the Athenians saw the Boiotians they decided to attack them before the Chalkidians. And they clashed with the Boiotians and won a great victory, and they killed many, and took seven hundred of them prisoner.
>
> HDT. 5.77.2[24]

Little can therefore be said about the way Greeks chose the field of battle before the late fifth century. There is only Herodotos' account of a Karian debate, held in 497 in the midst of the Ionian Revolt, on where to confront the Persian army. One side argued that their own troops would fight better with the river Marsyas at their backs, since it would force them to stand their ground; the other insisted they should let the Persians cross and then fight them on the riverbank, so that the enemy would not have a chance to get away. In the end, the Karians chose the latter option, and suffered a crushing defeat (Hdt. 5.118–119). We should not be tempted to dismiss this episode as a wholly un-Greek affair; Herodotos himself steps in to stress that he thought the former plan was better (5.118.2). Clearly, by the mid-fifth century at least, Greeks like him were giving this matter serious thought.[25]

On the topic of *when* to fight, we have more comprehensive evidence, in the form of a list of surprise attacks stretching back as far as recorded history allows us to see. In 546, for example, Peisistratos regained his tyranny by charging his enemies at rest after breakfast (Hdt. 1.63.1). Herodotos does not condemn the tyrant's cunning; in fact, he mentions the role of an Arkadian seer in the inception of Peisistratos' plan (1.62.4). Elsewhere, too, he appears to suggest that a surprise attack could be divinely inspired. In the early years of the fifth century, the Phokians destroyed a force of Thessalians by attacking their camp at night; Herodotos claims that a seer from the Peloponnese was behind the plan. He goes on to list the monuments dedicated at Delphi and Abai from the spoils of the battle (8.27.3–5). These anecdotes suggest that, far from being regarded as a violation of some supposed convention, attacks of this kind were accepted as a feature of warfare and could even be applauded for their effectiveness. A number of further examples could be cited.[26] These surprise attacks of course relied on the shock of sudden violence—on forcing the enemy to fight when they were least prepared. The implication is clear: even in late Archaic Greece, control over the time of battle could be used as a weapon.

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[24] For similar examples see Hdt. 1.66.3; Thuc. 1.108.1; Diod. 11.78.1–2.

[25] Rawlings 2007, 64, 89–90. Tritle (2007b, 211) has asserted that 'providing the stuffs of war and deciding where to fight were fundamentals of war that Herodotus understood.'

The response to Xerxes' invasion further showed that the defenders were keenly aware of the uses of different types of terrain. They explicitly tried to avoid a pitched battle in the open, in which Persian numbers and mobility would count heavily against the Greeks. It has already been noted that the field of Marathon was the Persians' chosen ground; the Athenians were reluctant to fight there, and Miltiades understood the burden of responsibility he carried for giving the order to do so (Hdt. 6.109–110). Such risks would not be taken again. At Plataia the Greeks waited, suffering thirst, harassment and dwindling supplies, for the Persians to attack them on the heights.[27] Before that fight they had even hoped to avoid a battle altogether, trusting in their country's nearly impassable geography. Their strategy had been to occupy a string of bottlenecks and thus negate every advantage the Persian army had. It is worth stressing that this approach cannot have been a new idea in Greece at the time; the Spartans narrowed the pass at Thermopylai not by building, but by rebuilding the Phokian wall (Hdt. 7.175–177).

There are plenty of indications, then, that the benefits of careful positioning were well understood in Greece by the time of the Persian Wars; the Greeks showed no inclination to waive these benefits in favour of a straightforward confrontation. It may of course be argued that wars against non-Greeks were fought along different lines, or that it was precisely the foreign threat that forced the Greeks to turn to unusual methods.[28] Yet it is difficult to believe that the knowledge applied to this conflict appeared out of nowhere, and none of the larger states of mainland Greece had fought major foreign wars before. Certainly they had no qualms about using the element of surprise against other Greeks. Again, the fact that Herodotos was able to conceive of the sort of judgment he puts in the mouth of Mardonios shows that at his time the matter of choosing a battlefield went far beyond simply deciding on a suitable day and an agreeable plain.

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[26] For a comprehensive list, see Krentz 2000, 183–199; Van Wees 2004, 131–133.

[27] Konijnendijk 2012, 9, 13. Delbrück (1908, 94) explicitly took this to have been the lesson of Marathon.

[28] This is sometimes suggested, as for instance by Hanson (2000, 211), but compare Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 34; Lammert 1899, 21 n. 1; Adcock 1957, 11–12; Lazenby 1985, 90, 97. As we have seen in the Introduction, Hanson and others elsewhere frequently insist it was the Peloponnesian War, not the Persian invasions, that changed the nature of warfare in Greece.

When the first comprehensive Greek battle descriptions start to appear in the late fifth century, a highly developed picture promptly emerges. Thucydides provides an especially detailed account of the fighting between Argos and Sparta in 418, and this account may serve in many ways as an instructive example of what happened when two large Greek citizen armies set out to meet each other in battle.

Both sides had marshalled their entire populations for the campaign: an Argive bid for supremacy over the Peloponnese. Strong allies were on the way to join the forces of each side.[29] With two armies roughly evenly matched and confident of their power, it would seem the stage was set for the kind of decisive hoplite battle for which Mardonios mocked the Greeks: a needlessly bloody slugging match on the flattest ground they could find. But what happened first was this:

> καὶ καταλαμβάνουσιν ἑκάτεροι λόφον: καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἀργεῖοι ὡς μεμονωμένοις τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις παρεσκευάζοντο μάχεσθαι, ὁ δὲ Ἆγις τῆς νυκτὸς ἀναστήσας τὸν στρατὸν καὶ λαθὼν ἐπορεύετο ἐς Φλειοῦντα παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ξυμμάχους.
>
> Each side seized a hill, and the Argives prepared to fight the Lakedaimonians while they were alone; but at night Agis broke up his camp and slipped away undetected to join the rest of the allies at Phleious.
>
> THUC. 5.58.2

King Agis of Sparta then arranged for his allies to enter the territory of Argos by different routes, surrounding the Argive army that would march in defence of its homeland. In particular, when the Argives were engaged with the Spartan main force, the horsemen of Sparta’s Boiotian allies were to attack them from the rear.

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[29] Thuc. 5.58; the number and importance of the allies to both belligerents is stressed at 5.60.3–5. It has often been pointed out that most major Greek armies consisted of numerous allied contingents. The consequences of this will be discussed in the chapters below.

> τὸ μὲν οὖν πλῆθος τῶν Ἀργείων καὶ τῶν ξυμμάχων οὐχ οὕτω δεινὸν τὸ παρὸν ἐνόμιζον, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν καλῷ ἐδόκει ἡ μάχη ἔσεσθαι, καὶ τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους ἀπειληφέναι ἐν τῇ αὐτῶν τε καὶ πρὸς τῇ πόλει.
>
> The masses among the Argives and their allies did not see the danger they were in, but thought that the battle would be fought in a fine place, and that they had intercepted the Lakedaimonians in their own country and close to the city.
>
> THUC. 5.59.4

They were saved at the last moment when two of their commanders, more alert to their potentially disastrous situation, sent to Agis to agree on a truce. Yet many on both sides were angry at what they saw as a missed opportunity to crush their opponents. Both armies soon marched out again; the Spartans now invaded the territory of Argos' ally Mantineia.

> οἱ δ᾽ Ἀργεῖοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι ὡς εἶδον αὐτούς, καταλαβόντες χωρίον ἐρυμνὸν καὶ δυσπρόσοδον παρετάξαντο ὡς ἐς μάχην. καὶ οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι εὐθὺς αὐτοῖς ἐπῇσαν: καὶ μέχρι μὲν λίθου καὶ ἀκοντίου βολῆς ἐχώρησαν, ἔπειτα τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τις Ἄγιδι ἐπεβόησεν, ὁρῶν πρὸς χωρίον καρτερὸν ἰόντας σφᾶς, ὅτι διανοεῖται κακὸν κακῷ ἰᾶσθαι, δηλῶν τῆς ἐξ Ἄργους ἐπαιτίου ἀναχωρήσεως τὴν παροῦσαν ἄκαιρον προθυμίαν ἀνάληψιν βουλόμενον εἶναι.
>
> When the Argives and their allies saw them, they occupied a strong and inaccessible position, and formed up for battle. The Lakedaimonians went against them immediately, and came within a stone's or javelin's throw, when one of the older men, seeing that they were moving against a strong position, shouted to Agis that he meant to cure one evil with another, meaning that he intended his present ill-timed enthusiasm to make up for his much blamed retreat from Argos.
>
> THUC. 5.65.1–2

The Spartans proceeded to stage a withdrawal in an attempt to lure the Argives down from the hills 'and fight the battle on the level' (Thuc. 5.65.4). The Argive troops, however, were actually eager for battle themselves, and so the Spartan ploy worked better than expected:

> … οἵ τε Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος πρὸς τὸ Ἡράκλειον πάλιν ἐς τὸ αὐτὸ στρατόπεδον ἰόντες ὁρῶσι δι᾽ ὀλίγου τοὺς ἐναντίους ἐν τάξει τε ἤδη πάντας καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ λόφου προεληλυθότας. μάλιστα δὴ Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἐς ὃ ἐμέμνηντο

> ἐν τούτῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἐξεπλάγησαν. διὰ βραχείας γὰρ μελλήσεως ἡ παρασκευὴ αὐτοῖς ἐγίγνετο, καὶ εὐθὺς ὑπὸ σπουδῆς καθίσταντο ἐς κόσμον τὸν ἑαυτῶν …
>
> … and the Lakedaimonians, returning from the water to their old encampment by the temple of Herakles, suddenly saw their enemies right in front of them, all in battle formation and advanced from the hill. At that moment the Lakedaimonians suffered the greatest shock for as long as they could remember. They equipped themselves in a short span of time and instantly and hastily drew up in their own order …
>
> THUC. 5.66.1–2

Only then did the Argives and Spartans finally engage in pitched battle.

The patterns of this campaign can be seen throughout the Classical period. Greek armies constantly jockeyed for advantage, and the result was that their path to battle was rarely direct. The story of the campaign of 418 neatly reveals the various stages in which one side or the other might attempt to manipulate the time and place of the clash in order to skew the odds in its favour.

The first of these stages was at the very beginning of a campaign. If one side’s advance was quick enough, the other side could be isolated and forced to fight before allied reinforcements could reach them. Isokrates urged his readers to bear this in mind: ‘when you go to war with people who are brought together from many places, you must not wait until they are ready; you must attack while they are still scattered’ (4.165). In the campaign of 418, the Argives hoped to achieve just that; only Agis’ decision to march at night allowed the Spartans to elude them and join the rest of their coalition (Thuc. 5.58.2). When the anti-Spartan alliance gathered at Corinth in 394 to deliberate on its campaign strategy, Timolaos used the analogy of a river—small at its source, but gathering strength as other streams fed into it—to persuade them to march directly on Sparta itself (*Hell.* 4.2.11–12). Speed, of course, was the key to such plans. In his account of the aftermath of Leuktra, Xenophon praises Iason of Pherai for advancing deep into Boiotia before the Boiotians could gather their forces, noting that ‘often speed rather than force accomplishes what is needed’ (πολλαχοῦ τὸ τάχος μᾶλλον τῆς βίας διαπράττεται τὰ δέοντα, *Hell.* 6.4.21).

The next stage was when both armies were in the field, but it was not yet clear where, when, and over which specific stakes the two sides could be brought to battle. This indeterminate phase could offer opportunities for each army to secure the best possible conditions for the eventual clash. The defender might seek to position himself on advantageous ground, where approaches were difficult or reinforcements were near at hand. The Argives, like many other Greeks in the Classical period, were glad to form up in the shadow of their own city wall, which could provide them with covering fire and a safe haven in case of defeat.[30] For the attacker, however, this phase presented an opportunity for sudden marches against strategic targets that could force opponents to abandon a strong position or to commit their troops before they were ready. The Spartans in particular seem to have had a knack for wrong-footing their enemies in this way. At Mantineia, they threatened to divert a watercourse and flood enemy territory in order to lure the Argive alliance from their position on a strong hill (Thuc. 5.65.3–5). They provoked the battle of the Nemea by invading Corinthian territory before the anti-Spartan coalition was ready to march out (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.13–14). Their king Agesilaos practiced a strategy combining speed and misdirection against Tissaphernes in Asia Minor (Xen. *Ag.* 1.15–17, 29),[31] and then applied the same method in Greece on his return. In 390, he drew away the enemy garrison of Peiraion, near Corinth, by pretending to march on Corinth itself (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.3); early in the Boiotian War, he played a similar trick on the Thebans, and then attacked their forces in flank as they tried to overtake him (5.4.50–51). In 371, Kleombrotos invaded Boiotia by an unexpected route, forcing the Thebans to commit to pitched battle at Leuktra (6.4.3–4).[32]

This stage, in which the locations and objectives of armies seemed to be in flux, also provided the perfect chance for ambushes and surprise attacks. There were a few known windows of opportunity for strikes of this kind, as Xenophon's fictional version of Kambyses taught his son Kyros:

> … σιτοποιεῖσθαί τε γὰρ ἀνάγκη ἀμφοτέρους, κοιμᾶσθαί τε ἀνάγκη ἀμφοτέρους καὶ ἕωθεν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα σχεδὸν ἅμα πάντας ἴεσθαι, καὶ ταῖς ὁδοῖς ὁποῖαι ἂν ὦσι τοιαύταις ἀνάγκη χρῆσθαι.
>
> … both sides need to prepare food; both sides need to sleep, and in the morning almost all at the same time heed the calls of nature; and whatever roads may exist, both sides need to use similarly.
>
> XEN. *Kyr.* 1.6.36[33]

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[30] Thuc. 5.59.4. The advantage was also apparent for instance at Athens (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.33–34), Haliartos (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.18–19; Plut. *Lys.* 29.2), Olynthos (Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.5), Thebes (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.53) and Halikarnassos (Diod. 17.24.6). Its value is stressed by Aineias the Tactician (16.18).

[31] Lee 2016, 278–279.

[32] During his third invasion of the Peloponnese, Epaminondas tried a similar ploy against the Spartans, bypassing their army and descending on Sparta by surprise (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.9).

[33] See also Xen. *Hipparch.* 7.12.

When Timoleon attacked his Sicilian Greek enemies while they were setting up camp (Plut. *Tim.* 12.4–8), he availed himself of essentially the same trick that Peisistratos had used more than two hundred years before. These centuries saw engagements such as Thrasyboulos' dawn attack on the forces of the Thirty (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.5–6) and Epameinondas' dawn assault on the pass of Oneion in 369 (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.15–16). The latter's troops timed their march to arrive at the exact moment the enemy watch was to be changed.[34] Dionysios I of Syracuse also used attacks at sunrise to catch his enemies off guard (Diod. 14.72.1–3, 104.2). Demosthenes, who had successfully used a night attack against an army of Ambrakiots in 426 (Thuc. 3.112), tried in vain to force the defences of Syracuse by a nocturnal assault after a string of set-piece battles and siege operations had failed to produce a decisive result (Thuc. 7.43–44).[35] If the terrain allowed it, ambushes could also be used as an alternative to open battle, as the Thebans showed the Athenians during the First Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 1.113); Peisistratos is said to have set a nocturnal ambush against Megarian invaders (Ain. Takt. 4.8–9), and the fourth-century generals Iphikrates and Chabrias were masters of the craft.[36] In all of these cases, of course, the point was to fight a confused and terrified enemy—to avoid a more difficult battle by choosing the most advantageous moment to fight. It may be out of fear of such a sudden attack that Agis, when he first encountered the Argives, chose to sneak away in the night (Thuc. 5.58.2).

The next stage was when the opposing armies were already in sight of each other. At this point, the range of potential locations for battle had shrunk, but that did not mean that the belligerents would simply gravitate towards the nearest suitable plain. To avoid becoming an easy target, armies that set out for battle did not make their camp in the open: according to Polybios, 'Greeks, when choosing a place for a camp, think primarily of security from the natural strength of the position' (6.42.2).[37] In other words, they looked for a place that would be as difficult as possible for an enemy to attack. This could be on a hill, as at Plataia (Hdt. 9.19), Lynkos (Thuc. 4.124.2–3), Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.7.4), Koroneia (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.16) or Leuktra (6.4.4, 14); it could be across a ravine, as at Olpai (Thuc. 3.107.3), or across a river, as at Olympia (Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.29); it could be in a gap between protective terrain features, as the Athenians found at Syracuse (Thuc. 6.66.1).[38] If no such shelter was available, an exposed position could be fortified, as a Spartan-led alliance did inside the Long Walls of Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9).[39] As the old man in Agis' army pointed out, it was extremely unwise to advance against an enemy on his chosen ground. Indeed, Xenophon praises Epameinondas for refusing to assault a strong position even with superior numbers (*Hell.* 7.5.8).[40] Such attacks required a great amount of ingenuity and coordination; most Greek commanders did not think themselves equal to the task. They knew the result could be disastrous.[41]

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[34] The Arkadians also carefully timed a dawn attack on the Eleians in 364 (Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.13).

[35] Roisman 1993, 26, 63, 72–74.

[36] See Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.15, 4.8.35–39, 5.1.10–12.

[37] Note Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 12.1–4; Isok. 6.74; Krentz 2007, 162.

The result of this habit of careful positioning was that pitched battles were only possible if the opposing armies were willing to come down from their preferred ground and face each other. They did not do so out of a desire to fight fairly; rather, to deploy for open battle was to choose a middle road between making a suicidal assault on a strong position and going home empty-handed. As long as Greek armies largely consisted of citizen levies, torn away temporarily from their everyday lives, their generals were under constant pressure to force a resolution even if the circumstances were less than ideal. Nevertheless, as Krentz has shown, the 'third option' of battle in the open would only be considered if the difference in troop numbers on both sides was not too great.[42] If one side thought itself at too great a disadvantage, no battle would be fought. Agis' initial retreat proves the point; he was unwilling to face the Argives without the support of his allies (Thuc. 5.58.2). In 410, when his army was confronted unexpectedly by an Athenian levy outside the walls of Athens, Agis retreated again (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.33–34). At Megara in 424, the Athenians refused to engage Brasidas, 'their generals reckoning that the danger was not equal' (Thuc. 4.73.4). After suffering three consecutive defeats in battle against an Athenian invasion force, the Chians decided they would not try again, and abandoned the countryside to the enemy (Thuc. 8.24.2–3). Similarly, when Agesilaos marched the

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[38] For further examples see Krentz 2002, 27–28; Echeverría 2011, 49 n. 10; Bardunias/Ray 2016, 175–192.

[39] For other instances, see Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.38, 6.5.30, 7.4.32.

[40] According to Diodoros, Agesilaos also decided to break off his attack on the Athenians and Thebans at Thespiai when he realised the enemy's high ground advantage (Diod. 15.32.3–6; Munn 1987, 118–121). Xenophon offers a similar story at *Hell.* 5.4.50.

[41] The finest demonstration was the battle of Mounichia, in which the Thirty of Athens were defeated by a small force of poorly equipped but well-positioned insurgents (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.10–19; Diod. 14.33.2–3).

[42] Krentz 1997, 61, 65–70; 2000, 177. A century earlier, Lammert (1899, 16–17) carried a similar argument much further, claiming that city-states would often deliberately reduce the size of their own army to provoke the enemy to battle.

Peloponnesian army into Boiotia in 378, the Thebans kept to their fortifications, ‘wary of engaging on equal terms in the plain’ (τὸν ἐν τοῖς πεδίοις ἐξ ἴσου κίνδυνον ὑπομένειν εὐλαβοῦντο, Diod. 15.32.3).[43]

When they *did* decide to fight in the open, this decision led to a final stage of possible manipulation of the conditions of battle. Greeks intent on an engagement did everything in their power to unbalance their opponents and tip the scales in their favour.[44] They tried their best to keep their battle plans secret and to strike before the enemy could react. The Corinthians at Solygeia charged the Athenians while they were still disembarking from their ships (Thuc. 4.43.1); the Ephesians may have attempted something similar when the Athenians tried to take that city (*Hell. Oxy*. fr. 1, 5–14). At Delion, the Theban commander formed up his army behind a hill, out of sight of his enemies (Thuc. 4.93.1, 96.1). Brasidas hoped to use the city walls of Amphipolis to keep his troop dispositions out of sight and charge the Athenians unexpectedly—though the Athenian vantage point on a hill allowed them to see exactly what he was doing (Thuc. 5.9.6–7, 5.10.2). The Athenians did manage to achieve surprise when they sallied out from Megara in 458 (Thuc. 1.105.6), as did the Thebans at Haliartos (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.18–19; Plut. *Lys*. 28.5); both succeeded in overwhelming and routing their respective opponents. At the Nemea the Spartans got a shock similar to that at Mantineia: they were unable to see through the tall grass that their enemies were already advancing until they were almost in front of them (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19). At the second battle of Mantineia in 362, Epameinondas fooled the Spartans into thinking he was setting up camp, then suddenly attacked (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.21–22). It has been suggested that his use of cavalry at Leuktra was meant to cover the deployment of his phalanx with a dust screen.[45] In addition to these attempts to achieve surprise, it was common to arrange for friends to come up at an opportune moment and strike the enemy in the rear. This was Agis’ plan in Argos, but also the Corinthians’ plan at Potidaia (Thuc. 1.62.3) and the Athenians’ plan at Delion (4.93.2), where their enemies beat them to it (4.96.5).[46] In 370, when Agesilaos allowed his Arkadian enemies to unite so they might ‘do battle justly and in the open’, Xenophon notes that this was only because he was afraid that if he engaged one part of their army, the other would attack him in the flank or rear (*Hell.* 6.5.16). Even more insidious, although possibly not premeditated, was the sudden betrayal of one side by some of its own men: the Thessalian cavalry at Tanagra (Thuc. 1.107.7), for example, or the Achaians at Herakleia in Trachis in 409 (Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.18). If we consider the list of Classical Greek pitched battles of which a more or less detailed description survives (Table 1),[47] we find that about two thirds of them were affected by attempts to deceive, surprise, or gain a terrain advantage.

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[43] Note also the Spartans’ alleged refusal to engage the army of Epameinondas at Sparta ‘until the time is right’ (Diod. 15.65.5).

[44] Krentz 2000, 169; Rawlings 2007, 81–82.

[45] Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10 and 13; Anderson 1970, 213–216; Buckler 1980, 86–87.

[46] Demosthenes’ ambush at Olpai (Thuc. 3.107.3) was essentially the same ploy; Brasidas spelled out its effectiveness to his men (Thuc. 5.9.6–8).

TABLE 1 *Surprise, deception, and terrain advantage in pitched battles*

| Date | Location | Manipulation | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 458 | Megara | Athenians launch sudden attack on Corinthians setting up trophy for earlier battle | Thuc. 1.105.6 |
| 457 | Oinophyta | – (although Athenian commander deceives his own troops to encourage them) | Polyain. 1.35 |
| 432 | Potidaia | Potidaians arrange for allied cavalry to attack enemy in rear | Thuc. 1.62.3 |
| 429 | Spartolos | – | Thuc. 2.79.2–3 |
| 426 | Olpai | Athenians hide detachment in overgrown hollow road to attack enemy in rear | Thuc. 3.107.3 |
| 425 | Solygeia | Corinthians attack before Athenians are fully disembarked | Thuc. 4.43.1 |
| 424 | Delion | Thebans deploy behind hill, advance unexpectedly | Thuc. 4.93.1, 96.1 |
| 423/2 | Laodokeion | – | Thuc. 4.134.1 |
| 418 | Mantineia | Argives appear suddenly, catching Spartans unawares | Thuc. 5.66.1–2 |
| 415 | Syracuse | Athenians advance unexpectedly while Syracusans are still forming up | Thuc. 6.69.1 |
| 414 | Syracuse | Athenians disembark forces out of sight to occupy strong position without alerting Syracusans | Thuc. 6.97.2–3 |
| 414 | Syracuse | – | Thuc. 6.101.4 |
| 412 | Miletos | – | Thuc. 8.25.2–4 |
| 409 | Ephesos | Athenians land detachments on either side of city; attempt to attack engaged enemy in rear? | Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.7–9 |
| 409 | The Horns (Megara) | – | Hell. Oxy. 1.1;<br>Diod. 13.65.1–2 |

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[47] Based on Schwartz' helpful appendix (2009, 235–292). I have narrowed down the list to land battles between Greeks in which both sides were prepared and willing to engage. Some of the examples listed here have been noted by Krentz (1997, 57–58).

| Date | Location | Manipulation | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 403 | Mounichia | – (although seer, for religious reasons and to no tactical gain, postpones rebel charge until he is killed) | Xen. Hell. 2.4.18–19 |
| 395 | Haliartos | Thebans launch sudden attack against advancing Spartans | Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.19 |
| 394 | Nemea | Allied advance hidden by vegetation | Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19 |
| 394 | Koroneia | – | Xen. Hell. 4.3.17 |
| 392 | Long Walls of Corinth | Spartans fight from the cover of stockade and ditch | Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9 |
| 381 | Olynthos | Olynthians withdraw slowly to lure Teleutias' forces piecemeal toward the city | Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.3–6 |
| 375 | Tegyra | – | Plut. Pel. 17.1–3 |
| 371 | Leuktra | Spartan cavalry and light troops attack deserters and baggage before battle; cavalry deployment may have served as dust screen | Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9–10, 13 |
| 368 | Melea (Tearless Battle) | Argives and Arkadians appear suddenly, attempting to trap Spartans in narrow pass | Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.29 |
| 364 | Kynoskephalai | Both sides rush to occupy central high ground | Plut. *Pel.* 32.2–3 |
| 362 | Mantineia | Thebans give Spartans the impression they are setting up camp for the night, then suddenly attack | Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.21–22 |
| 349/8 | Tamynai | Athenians postpone attack, despite allied defeat, until Euboians become overconfident and lose battle order | Plut. *Phok.* 13.1–2 |
| 338 | Chaironeia | – | Diod. 16.86.1–2 |

The inevitable conclusion is that Greeks did not feel honour-bound to do battle at an appointed time or place. If an enemy could be goaded into the fight at a disadvantage, that appears to have been the preferred course of action; if not, they could be surprised by an ambush or a sudden advance. Failing that, battle could be postponed for a long time, or even refused entirely. There are a few famous examples of armies encamped opposite each other for days without initiating combat, and this has sometimes been interpreted as a polite delay until both sides were ready.[48] Our sources suggest we should be more cynical in our assessment. At Plataia, each army was waiting for the other to make the mistake of crossing the river between them (Hdt. 9.41). It seems likely that the five days' delay at Olpai was due to a similar reasoning involving the ravine that crossed the battlefield (Thuc. 3.107.3). At the Nemea, the Boiotians refused to fight until they were granted the right wing of the line, where they would not have to face the Spartans (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18). Inside the Long Walls of Corinth, a full day passed without a battle, because the Argives had not yet arrived to fight one (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9).[49]

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[48] For the full (brief) list see Pritchett 1974, 154.

Still, major pitched battles did take place, and most of them took place on plains. This is perhaps the only thing that appears to confirm Mardonios' deliberate lies, and it is central to the notion of Greek warfare as a paradox and a conspiracy. But the examples cited here show that battle in the open field and battle by mutual consent are far from the same thing. Armies clashed, or did not clash, when one encountered the other drawn up in battle array.

Why did battles nevertheless happen on open ground? As a practical alternative to the idea of gentlemanly agreements, the tendency of Greeks to fight on flat ground has sometimes been explained as a physical necessity for men wearing heavy hoplite armour. However, Rawlings has shown that the hoplite was a more versatile and mobile type of warrior than is often assumed.[50] High ground was hardly impossible to navigate; in fact, as we have seen, hoplite forces sought refuge on the heights at every opportunity. Adcock suggested instead that battles were fought on level plains because neither side could be allowed the advantage of fighting downhill,[51] but this still supposes some sort of formal agreement, some intentional interference in the choice of battlefield. Rather, we may wonder whether fighting on flat land was in any way typically Greek. As noted above, the Persians were always keen to fight on the plain; Wheeler has pointed out that the same may be said of Rome.[52] Polybios stressed the need for tight Hellenistic infantry formations to fight on flat ground without obstacles, to avoid disruption of the ranks (18.31.2–6).[53] There are many other reasons to prefer a battlefield that is naturally delineated and spacious and that provides an uninterrupted line of sight. But most importantly of all, the Classical Greek evidence suggests that battles on level ground were the result of a simple estimate of the probability of victory. If one side held a strong position, the other would refuse to engage. If both sides were confident enough, they would come down into the plain to fight.

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[49] Van Wees 2004, 134; Rawlings 2007, 81–82.

[50] Grundy 1911, 244, 267; Gomme 1950, 10; Connor 1988, 12, 25; Ober 1991, 173; Wheeler 2007c, 202; compare Rawlings 2000.

[51] Adcock 1957, 5–6, 91; see also Lammert 1899, 11.

[52] Raaflaub 2013, 98; Wheeler 2007c, 202.

[53] Polybios was certainly referring to the Macedonian pike phalanx; this is likely but not certain in the case of Aristotle (*Pol.* 1303b.12).

Even so, the sites of most Greek battles were hardly snooker tables[54]—despite the insistence of some scholars that Epameinondas referred to Boiotia as the ‘dancing floor of Ares’ because it was smooth enough for the purpose.[55] The battlefield at Olpai bordered on an overgrown hollow road where Demosthenes was able to hide four hundred men (Thuc. 3.107.3). At Delion two flooded streams prevented the armies’ extreme wings from meeting, and the Athenians probably fought uphill (Thuc. 4.96.1–2). At Syracuse the Athenians chose to fight on a field restricted by cliffs and marshes (Thuc. 6.66.1). As noted, the Battle of the Nemea was fought on that river’s banks, where tall reeds and grasses almost totally obscured the view (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19). The armies of the second battle of Mantineia stretched beyond the narrow plain, and the Boiotian right wing skirmished in the hills (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.24). Greece simply does not contain the sort of extensive open flatlands that would make an engagement truly fair—and if it did, bearing in mind the Greeks’ desire to keep a safe haven near at hand, it is unlikely they would have chosen to fight there.

### Theory

Much of what has been discussed here became the explicit advice of military thinkers of the fourth century. While there is no extant guide to pitched battle or its preparation, known works on other aspects of warfare leave little room for doubt:

> Ἐπιτίθεσο δὲ τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐν οἷς ἄκων μὲν μὴ μαχήσῃ, μαχόμενος δὲ μὴ ἔλασσον ἕξεις τῶν πολεμίων. (…) πολὺ δὲ κρεῖσσον, ὡς γέγραπται, ἐνδόντα ἀφυλάκτως διακειμένοις αὐτοῖς ἐπιθέσθαι.
>
> Attack the enemy where you will not have to fight unwillingly, and where you will not be at a disadvantage to the enemy if you do fight. (…) It is much better, as I have written, to yield to them, and then attack them when they let their guard down.
>
> AIN. TAKT. 16.7–10

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[54] Pritchett 1985, 82–83; Rawlings 2007, 88. As Krentz put it (2010, 51), ‘no plain in Greece looked like a Kansas wheat field’.

[55] Hanson 2000, 208; Wheeler 2007c, 202; for the saying, see Plut. *Mark.* 21.2; *Mor.* 193e.

> μηχανῶ (…) τεταγμένοις τε τοῖς σαυτοῦ ἀτάκτους λαμβάνῃς τοὺς πολεμίους καὶ ὡπλισμένοις ἀόπλους καὶ ἐγρηγορόσι καθεύδοντας, καὶ φανερούς σοι ὄντας ἀφανὴς αὐτὸς ὢν ἐκείνοις καὶ ἐν δυσχωρίᾳ αὐτοὺς γιγνομένους ἐν ἐρυμνῷ αὐτὸς ὢν ὑποδέξῃ.
>
> Contrive (…) to catch the enemy in disorder with your side in formation, to catch them unarmed while fully armed, to catch them asleep while wide awake, when they are visible to you but you are invisible to them, and face them when they find themselves in poor ground while you are in a strong position.
>
> XEN. *Kyr.* 1.6.35

Isokrates writes that the Spartans will have nothing to fear from their numerous enemies as long as they fight at a place and time of their choosing (6.80). There is a good deal of focus both in Xenophon and in the work of Aineias the Tactician on the importance of seizing defensible ground, on setting ambushes and being wary of them, and of keeping constant watch against any sudden attack.[56] Aineias advises the defenders of a city to attack invading troops while they are making dinner (16.12). Xenophon notes the high spirits of troops about to spring a trap, and the debilitating dismay of their victims (*Hipparch.* 4.10–15); he believes that unnecessary risks should be carefully avoided (5.2–3), and that deceit and surprise are some of the greatest weapons at any commander's disposal (8.19–20).

Were these the lessons learned from practice or the cynical guidelines for a new kind of war? The fact that Xenophon takes enemy ambushes and potential surprise attacks entirely for granted speaks volumes about the realities encountered by this veteran commander. He even recommends the use of sham ambuscades, which could help cover a retreat by deliberately exploiting the enemy's fear of being ambushed; a few men visibly 'hidden' could stop entire armies in their tracks. In addition, he repeatedly stresses how overconfidence and recklessness could turn even the finest forces into helpless prey.[57] This is not the advice of one who is used to fighting battles at an appointed time and place. Both his military treatises and his historical accounts instead suggest a chaos of shock and opportunism, in which no army was ever safe. It will not do to argue that his attitude was the result of his experience with the Ten Thousand in Asia Minor; his advice is explicitly derived from and applied to the situation in Greece. His idealised image of king Agesilaos of Sparta illustrates how important he thought the threat of sudden attack should be to a general:

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[56] Xen. *Hipparch.* 4.5–13, 7.8–9; *Lak.Pol.* 12.2–3; *Ag.* 6.5–7; Ain. Takt. 1.2, 15.2–7, 16.4–20.

[57] Xen. *An.* 5.2.28–32; *Hell.* 3.5.19, 4.5.12, 4.8.36; *Hipparch.* 5.8, 8.15; *Kyr.* 1.6.37.

> ὁπότε γε μὴν πορεύοιτο εἰδὼς ὅτι ἐξείη τοῖς πολεμίοις μάχεσθαι, εἰ βούλοιντο, συντεταγμένον μὲν οὕτως ἦγε τὸ στράτευμα ὡς ἂν ἐπικουρεῖν μάλιστα ἑαυτῷ δύναιτο, ἡσύχως δ' ὥσπερ ἂν παρθένος ἡ σωφρονεστάτη προβαίνοι, νομίζων ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ τό τε ἀτρεμὲς καὶ ἀνεκπληκτότατον καὶ ἀθορυβητότατον καὶ ἀναμαρτητότατον καὶ δυσεπιβουλευτότατον εἶναι.
>
> On the march, whenever he knew that the enemy could fight him if they chose, he would lead his army in such a formation that he could most easily defend himself, moving on as quietly as the most modest girl, believing that this was the best way to keep calm, and least vulnerable to panic, confusion, and blunders, and safest from surprise attack.
>
> XEN. *Ag.* 6.7

There is no reason to assume that this approach was only relevant when fighting barbarians—or that it only became relevant to the Greeks after the Peloponnesian War. Agesilaos' caution might have saved Peisistratos' enemies from defeat; it might have prevented the destruction of the Athenian army in a Boiotian ambush at Koroneia in 447. The speech Thucydides puts into Brasidas' mouth before the battle of Amphipolis stresses the advantages of surprising and deceiving a careless enemy instead of attacking him directly (5.9.2–6)—advantages that were apparently well known and should have taught the Athenians to be more alert. In fact, a good number of the engagements mentioned in this chapter may serve to support Xenophon's programmatic statement on victories in war, that 'the most and greatest were won by deceit' and not by straightforward tests of strength.[58] Shock and opportunism certainly seem very appropriate terms to characterise the overture to First Mantineia.

The theory of war, then, appears to follow entirely from the practice. This is no surprise if we bear in mind that the extant military treatises are based either on a lifetime of military experience or on a carefully collated repository of examples from actual history. But the fact deserves to be stressed. Scholars who regard the Peloponnesian War as a watershed tend to see the military manuals of the fourth century as the expression of wholly new principles of warfare that could not have existed before. In reality these treatises appear to be no more than articulations of facts well known for centuries to those who had seen war. They served a didactic or an antiquarian purpose but they probably did not present anything particularly new. On the matter of choosing a time and place for battle, they advise to do what Greeks had always done—to avoid risks, to seek some advantage, and to fight precisely when and where the enemy is least likely to fight well.

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[58] Xen. *Hipparch.* 5.11, if we take deceit (ἀπάτη) to mean any attempt to influence a battle by misleading or withholding information from the enemy. For a recent treatment of the changing meanings of the word in the Greek historians, see Coin-Longeray 2006, 12–16; the author does not, however, consider Xenophon's non-historical works.

⁂

What happened when two Classical Greek armies set out to fight each other may be summed up as follows. Both sides tried to obtain the best possible conditions for battle. If one force gained the upper hand—be it through numbers, surprise, the presence of allies, or a terrain advantage—it would seek an immediate confrontation. The other side could be forced to stand its ground, or it could withdraw, by speed or stealth, to fight another day. When both sides felt their position gave them the edge, campaigns might reach an impasse. Neither army would be willing to give up its advantage. However, it would have been obvious to the Greeks that gloating and waiting for the enemy from the safety of their carefully selected ground would ultimately get them nowhere. Few purposes could be achieved without a confrontation. So, whether immediately or eventually, they came down from their hills or forts, played the deceptive or manipulative cards they had left, and fought the battle in the plain.

# CHAPTER 4

# 'Deployed to Fit the Need': Forming Up for Battle

## Worthless Hoplites

In works on Greek warfare, it is common to speak mainly of hoplites. If the focus is not specifically on troop types such as cavalry or archers, these forces are often only briefly discussed—typically in isolated chapters with titles like 'The Other Warriors'—or even ignored altogether.[1] Even though their role in minor engagements and irregular warfare is widely acknowledged, modern scholarship seems to have inherited from the Prussians the tendency to exclude them from discussions of pitched battle. There is some justification for this; hoplites usually greatly outnumbered at least the horsemen and the specialist light-armed infantry (*psiloi*) in Greek armies, and some battle accounts from the Classical period focus on the actions of hoplite phalanxes to such an extent that it is all but impossible for us to reconstruct what their more mobile fellow combatants were doing. Yet they were almost always there, and our sources carefully report their presence. Often they had crucial roles to play. To assume that 'only hoplites seriously counted' is to take the ancients' descriptions out of context and their narrative conventions at face value.[2] Plutarch ascribed this famous analogy to the fourth-century Athenian general Iphikrates:

> … χερσὶ μὲν ἐοίκασιν οἱ ψιλοί, ποσὶ δὲ τὸ ἱππικόν, αὐτὴ δὲ ἡ φάλαγξ στέρνῳ καὶ θώρακι, κεφαλῇ δὲ ὁ στρατηγός …

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[1] The trend was set by Rüstow/Köchly 1852. See more recently Anderson 1970; Hanson's combined works; Debidour 2002; Van Wees 2004; Lendon 2005; Rawlings 2007; Toalster 2011. For deliberate exceptions see Martin 1887; Lippelt 1910; Best 1969; Bugh 1988; Spence 1993; Worley 1994; Gaebel 2002; Blaineau 2015.

[2] The line, a strange criticism of Thucydides, is from Cawkwell 2005, 250. For the sentiment see Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 144, 182; Droysen 1889, 95; Lammert 1899, 5–9; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 84, 87; Grundy 1911, 253, 259, 274; Adcock 1957, 11, 16; Hignett 1963, 45–50; Anderson 1970, 1–2, 7, 42; Cartlegde 1977, 23–24; Holladay 1982, 97, 101–103; Sage 1996, xvii–xix; Runciman 1998, 733; Hanson 2000, 204, 216; Moggi 2002, 204–205; Hutchinson 2006, viii–ix; Toalster 2011, 22, 50–52, 71. Compare Van Wees 1995, 162–165.

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> … the light-armed troops are like the hands, the cavalry like the feet, the phalanx itself is like chest and cuirass, and the general is the head …
>
> PLUT. *Pel.* 2.1[3]

If this saying is a more adequate reflection of Greek tactical thought, different troop types deserve to be more closely integrated into modern discussions of the deployment and battle tactics of Greek armies. How important were combined arms tactics in Greek approaches to battle?

Several scholars have recently made the case that different types of troops were not separately formed up on the battlefield before the end of the Archaic period.[4] The interplay of light and heavy troops therefore must have been as yet inconceivable; we can no more expect Archaic Greeks to make clever use of peltasts in battle than we can expect Napoleon to coordinate tactical air strikes. Nevertheless, as Patricia Hannah has argued, Greek art throughout the Archaic and Classical period tended to show 'mixed forces'—hoplites, *psiloi* and horsemen—in an attempt to 'capture the essence of each branch's particular forte and its contribution to the defence of the city.'[5] Some awareness of this contribution, however abstract, had apparently long existed. The use of allied cavalry by the Peisistratids (Hdt. 5.63.3–4) and of archers at the battle of Plataia (Hdt. 9.22.2, 9.60) shows that the emergence of troop specialisation was immediately followed by exploration of the advantages flexible forces had to offer.[6]

The Greeks soon discovered that unsupported heavy infantry was at the mercy of lighter troops. Some scholars have argued that hoplite armour was tough enough to make them all but invulnerable to missiles,[7] and that their formation was impervious to mounted assault—but these claims directly contradict the ancient sources. Acknowledgement of the vulnerability of hoplites was ubiquitous. Herodotos stresses the threat of the Persian horse at every turn (9.17–18, 21, 50, 51.3, 56.2, 68), and notes the casualties inflicted at Plataia by the arrows of their infantry (9.61.3). The battle of Malene in 493 was won by a Persian cavalry charge (Hdt. 6.29), and it is likely that the reckless Greek frontal assault at Marathon was meant to negate the tactical mobility of the enemy horse and the effectiveness of their archers.[8] The need to get through the archers’ killing zone quickly was explicitly a factor when hoplites faced Persian-led infantry again at Kounaxa (Xen. *An.* 1.8.18; Diod. 14.23.1; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.2.3). Thucydides finds fault with Demosthenes for leading his few hundred hoplites against the javelin-wielding Aitolians without waiting for his light-armed Lokrian allies to arrive; when his supporting archers ran out of missiles, his hoplite force was slaughtered (3.95.3–97.2). In his account of the fighting on Sphakteria, Thucydides notes that the *piloi* which the Spartans were wearing proved useless against Athenian arrows (4.34.3).[9] His focus on the power of cavalry, meanwhile, borders on the obsessive.[10] Xenophon relates how Arkadian hoplites feared Iphikrates’ peltasts ‘like children fear the bogeyman’ (*Hell.* 4.4.16–17), and how a small group of *psiloi* once routed the vaunted Sacred Band (*Hell.* 7.1.19). He also points out repeatedly that an army lacking in cavalry will be helpless against a mounted opponent, especially on level terrain.[11] Aristotle stresses that *psiloi* ‘fight easily’ against hoplites, and usually get the better of them (*Pol.* 1321a.19–20). Most striking of all is Plutarch’s description of Agesilaos’ preparations against the Persians and their elite mounted troops: ‘soon he had many and warlike horsemen,’ the author notes with approval, ‘instead of worthless hoplites’ (ταχὺ πολλοὺς καὶ πολεμικοὺς ἔχειν ἱππεῖς ἀντὶ δειλῶν ὁπλιτῶν, *Ag.* 9.4).

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[3] The saying is also cited in Polyain. *Strat.* 3.9.22.

[4] Krentz 2002, 34–35; 2010, 59–60; 2013b, 42–43; Van Wees 2004, 64, 181–183; Rawlings 2007, 54–57, 85; Echeverría 2012, 313–315.

[5] Hannah 2010, 284, 287, 291, 298–299.

[6] Note also the archers of Polykrates: Hdt. 3.39.3, 3.45.3.

[7] Adcock 1957, 14–16; Seibt 1977, 122, 134; Anderson 1991, 21; Lee 2006, 489; Schwartz 2009, 79–87; Aldrete/Bartell/Aldrete 2013, 103–104.

Such statements may contradict poetic ideals of bravery in hoplite combat, but as far as historical accounts are concerned, there is little to suggest that Greek warfare either was or should be the business of hoplites. The belief that the Greeks regarded missile troops as more of a nuisance than a threat seems to rest largely on two passages in Thucydides. First of these is the speech given by the Spartan general Brasidas to his mercenary hoplites and *neodamodeis* in Illyria. At first glance, this speech has a very clear message:

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[8] Martin 1887, 429–431; Delbrück 1908, 51, 71; Lorimer 1947, 115–116, 118; Lee 2008; Hanson 1989, 140; Krentz 2010, 143, 159, 173 (although this is disputed by Tuplin [2013, 223], who suggests the charge was meant to overcome fear).

[9] What exactly Thucydides meant by *piloi* is unclear (Hornblower 1996, 190). The word *pilos* means ‘felt’, and some authors have assumed that Thucydides is referring to conical felt caps worn in lieu of helmets (Lazenby 1985, 46; Hanson 1989, 83). However, Anderson (1970, 30) noted that, by 411 at the latest (Ar. *Lys.* 562), the term had come to refer to bronze helmets *shaped* like such caps, and this may already be its meaning in Thucydides.

[10] See Thuc. 1.111.1, 3.1.2, 4.95.2, 5.59.3, but especially during the Sicilian Expedition: 6.20.4, 6.21.1, 6.22, 6.37.2, 6.64.1, 6.66.1, 6.68.3, 6.70.3, 6.71.2, 7.11.4, 7.13.2, 7.78.7.

[11] Xen. *An.* 2.4.6, 2.5.17, 3.1.2, 3.2.18, 3.3.8–9, 3.4.24, 6.5.19, 6.5.29; *Hell.* 3.1.5, 3.4.15, 3.5.23, 6.5.17, 7.1.21; *Kyr.* 4.3.4–7.

> οὗτοι δὲ τὴν μέλλησιν μὲν ἔχουσι τοῖς ἀπείροις φοβεράν: καὶ γὰρ πλήθει ὄψεως δεινοὶ καὶ βοῆς μεγέθει ἀφόρητοι, ἥ τε διὰ κενῆς ἐπανάσεισις τῶν ὅπλων ἔχει τινὰ δήλωσιν ἀπειλῆς. προσμεῖξαι δὲ τοῖς ὑπομένουσιν αὐτὰ οὐχ ὁμοῖοι: (…) τοῦ τε ἐς χεῖρας ἐλθεῖν πιστότερον τὸ ἐκφοβῆσαι ὑμᾶς ἀκινδύνως ἡγοῦνται: ἐκείνῳ γὰρ ἂν πρὸ τούτου ἐχρῶντο.
>
> Our opponents are expecting to frighten those without experience; for indeed their numbers are terrible to behold and the volume of their shouting is unbearable and there is a clear threat in the way they wave their weapons in the air. But when they come to grips with those who stand their ground, they are not what they seem. (…) They prefer to rely on frightening you without risk rather than meeting you hand to hand; otherwise they would have done the the latter instead of the former.
>
> THUC. 4.126.5

The Spartan commander appears unimpressed with the local population of mobile warriors, and tells his men they will soon break through to safety. But the context of the speech is crucial. Brasidas' hoplites found themselves suddenly abandoned by their allies in hostile territory, forced to retreat while surrounded by enemies who vastly outnumbered them. Are we to believe it was the shouting that frightened these battle-hardened troops? In reality, the speech probably does not reflect Brasidas' supposed disdain for skirmishers, but his own hoplites' very real fear of them. They had marched out with a significant number of horsemen in support, but these had disappeared; they had *psiloi* of their own, but these were apparently no match for the enemy's numbers.[12] The speech is a plea to the men to maintain the protective square formation—their only hope of getting out alive. The Spartan commander may have appealed to the heavy infantry's apparent belief in their own superior courage, in the form of their willingness to stand their ground and fight hand to hand, but he did so to counterbalance the terror caused by their light-armed enemies. Those enemies were, and were clearly regarded as, a real threat.[13] Brasidas' encouragements and aggressive tactics proved vital to the survival of his force; the rearguard action of his picked troops and the persistent countercharges of the youngest of his hoplites eventually persuaded the Illyrians to find easier targets among the fleeing Macedonians (Thuc. 4.127). When the

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[12] Thuc. 4.124.1, 4.125.2; see Xen. *An.* 3.3.7 and 3.4.27, where friendly missile troops are rendered useless by their need to seek protection among the hoplites.

[13] Crowley (2012, 101) rightly characterised the speech as 'rhetorical misinterpretation'.

Ten Thousand found themselves in a similar situation, they despaired and took heavy losses until they managed to raise their own units of cavalry and slingers on the spot (Xen. *An.* 3.3.7–20).[14]

The second passage is Thucydides' account of the battle of Syracuse. His description of the skirmish preceding the battle is famously dismissive; the light-armed troops of the two sides threw their missiles at each other and ran away, 'as is usual with *psiloi*', and it was not until they had withdrawn that the battle really began (6.69.2). This account has led scholars to declare *psiloi* irrelevant to the course of major battles.[15] But we have already seen how the Athenians specifically chose the ground at Syracuse to give light troops no room to manoeuvre. The cliffs, houses and marshes that defined the edges of the battlefield gave the *psiloi* no choice but to attack head-on; their counterparts in the enemy force inevitably cancelled them out. The narrow plain simply did not allow for a better use of mobile warriors. The particulars of the battle of Syracuse say nothing about the combat potential of these men.[16] Indeed, the passage only makes sense as a comment on what happened when light-armed infantry faced *each other*—in a fight with hoplites, after all, it is difficult to imagine anything like the mutual rout Thucydides describes. His accounts of other engagements make his awareness of the danger posed by light troops abundantly clear;[17] the fact that he denies them much of a role in battle at Syracuse suggests that it may have been common practice to neutralise these men in pitched battles through a deliberate choice of ground—as in this case—or through the careful deployment of light troops screening the hoplite phalanx and absorbing the blow.

When the terrain did allow for tactical mobility, flexible forces could be deployed more freely. In these cases their effectiveness increased dramatically. Thucydides himself describes the methods used against the Spartans on Sphakteria:

> Δημοσθένους δὲ τάξαντος διέστησαν κατὰ διακοσίους τε καὶ πλείους, ἔστι δ' ᾗ ἐλάσσους, τῶν χωρίων τὰ μετεωρότατα λαβόντες, ὅπως ὅτι πλείστη ἀπορία ᾗ

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[14] Whitby (2004, 231) claimed that just a single more day's delay in the plain could have spelled doom for the mercenary force.

[15] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 144; Delbrück 1908, 34–35; Grundy 1911, 274–275; Anderson 1970, 42; discussed in Van Wees 2004, 64.

[16] Van Wees 2002, 66; 2004, 64. Note also the complete ineffectiveness of Iphikrates' otherwise extremely capable peltasts when confined within the Long Walls of Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11).

[17] Hornblower 1987, 158–159.

> τοῖς πολεμίοις πανταχόθεν κεκυκλωμένοις καὶ μὴ ἔχωσι πρὸς ὅτι ἀντιτάξωνται, ἀλλ᾿ ἀμφίβολοι γίγνωνται τῷ πλήθει, εἰ μὲν τοῖς πρόσθεν ἐπίοιεν, ὑπὸ τῶν κατόπιν βαλλόμενοι, εἰ δὲ τοῖς πλαγίοις, ὑπὸ τῶν ἑκατέρωθεν παρατεταγμένων.
>
> Demosthenes deployed [the *psiloi*] in units of two hundred or more, sometimes less, and made them occupy the highest points to paralyse the enemy, surrounding him on every side and leaving him with no one to march against, exposing him to the cross-fire of the swarm, struck by those in his rear if he attacked in front, and by those on one flank if he moved against the other.
>
> THUC. 4.32.3

Here we see the relative sophistication of Greek skirmishing tactics. Without serious opposition, light troops dominated the battlefield; in small, mobile packs they held to no fixed position but answered to the advice of military thinkers like Xenophon (*Hipparch.* 4.14–15) to strike against the weakest and most exposed part of an enemy force. They used their missiles to harass hoplites with impunity, attacking their unprotected sides, denying them a chance to come to grips; through exhaustion, despair and mounting casualties they would eventually break the hoplites' spirit.[18]

It is surely no surprise to hear of Spartans moaning after their defeat on Sphakteria that they had not been beaten fairly, and that archery was no proof of courage.[19] We can scarcely imagine how infuriating it must have been for these proudest of hoplites to find themselves utterly helpless against a rabble of ill-equipped warriors they could have dispatched with ease if they would just stand still. The hoplites' tactical response makes this frustration very clear. Hoplite forces beset by *psiloi* tended to send out their youngest and fittest men to chase off their attackers; these pursuing parties usually accomplished nothing, and suffered heavily when they turned to withdraw to the line. Yet their commanders kept sending them out again and again until they were completely exhausted.[20] It was apparently more than they could bear to see their men wounded and killed without at least an attempt to fight back. Indeed, the hoplites' impotent rage could take extreme forms. When the Ten Thousand finally managed a successful counterattack against their pursuers, and their newly formed cavalry corps killed large numbers of enemy *psiloi*, the hoplites proceeded of their own accord to mutilate the corpses (Xen. *An.* 3.4.5). When king Agesilaos came to Lechaion, where days before a Spartan unit had been destroyed by peltasts, Xenophon points out that he did not throw down the trophy (*Hell.* 4.5.10); apparently it could be expected that a less composed commander would have destroyed this monument of victory out of sheer indignation, despite its customary inviolability. To appreciate the psychological effect of the hoplites' helplessness, we should consider the fact that, far from fighting to the death, the Spartans on Sphakteria surrendered when less than a third of their force had fallen (Thuc. 4.38.5); at Lechaion, more than half survived the ordeal (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17).[21] Both times, the loss of heart of the heirs of Leonidas shocked all of Greece.[22] These casualty figures are of course far higher than those for pitched battles, but they still show that fights of *psiloi* against hoplites were not about annihilation—they were about methodically destroying the hoplites' will to fight.[23]

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[18] The process is outlined in Hdt. 9.20–21 and described in emphatic detail in Thuc. 2.79.5–6, 3.97.3–98.3, 4.32.3–35.1, 7.79.5–6; Xen. *An.* 3.4.25–28; *Hell.* 3.2.3–4, 4.5.13–16.

[19] Thuc. 4.40.2; Paus. 1.13.5; for more on this attitude to *psiloi* see Trundle 2010b, 142–146.

[20] Thuc. 3.97.3–98.1, 4.33.2, 4.125.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.15–16; however, note the claim (4.4.16) that the Spartans had at some point managed to do this successfully. See also Best 1969, 61; Konecny 2001, 98–99.

It may be argued, as Van Wees has done, that light troops were only able to accomplish this if they vastly outnumbered their hoplite victims.[24] Indeed, in Aitolia, on Sphakteria and at Lechaion the side fighting with *psiloi* clearly enjoyed an overwhelming numerical advantage. But it is not clear whether this was a necessary precondition for victory. Strictly theoretically, the numbers are irrelevant; since hoplites could do nothing against the attacks of light-armed troops, these troops could inflict casualties indefinitely without sustaining losses, and would eventually triumph regardless of the initial size of their force. The hoplites would never win. This is of course no more than a mathematical fact, and it does not take into account such factors as ammunition supply, stamina and time. However, the utter immunity of the light-armed warrior to counterattack by hoplites must be central to our interpretation of *psiloi* tactics. Victory in their battles depended less on the attrition rate they achieved than on the perceived ability of the enemy hoplites either to strike back or to reach a safe haven. Once these options were exhausted, the hoplites would inevitably break. In Aitolia, the hoplites fought on until the archers who protected them had spent their arrows (Thuc. 3.98.1–2). On Sphakteria, the Spartans surrendered only when their final defensive position had been compromised by troops in their rear (Thuc. 4.36–38). The men at Lechaion did not break before the peltasts, but they fled when they saw the Athenian phalanx approaching (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17). Numerical superiority was important only because it ensured that the point of critical exhaustion of options would indeed be reached. Again, the purpose of *psiloi* was not to annihilate the enemy, but to drain his fighting spirit—a process which did not require the presence of large numbers of these troops.[25]

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[21] Demosthenes' forces suffered a similar casualty rate in Aitolia (Thuc. 3.98.4). A notable exception here is the Theban force holding the pass at Kithairon against Kleombrotos in 378; Xenophon says they were wiped out to a man by the Spartan king's peltasts (*Hell.* 5.4.14).

[22] Thuc. 4.40.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18; Plut. *Ag.* 22.2–4.

[23] Wheeler 2001, 181.

[24] Van Wees 2004, 65.

Horsemen, too, could make heavy infantry dance to their tune.[26] As in the case of light infantry, certain rhetorical statements are often cited to show that the Greeks thought cavalry cowardly (Lys. 16.13) and ineffective in battle (Xen. *An.* 3.2.18–19), but the very authors who wrote those passages reveal elsewhere that they took the tactical abilities of horsemen very seriously (Lys. 14.10; Xen. *An.* 2.4.6, 3.1.2). The latter view seems to have been both widespread and justified. Especially on level ground, hoplite armies without cavalry support were generally unable to achieve anything at all against mounted opponents. This fact was so much taken for granted in Classical Athens that it became the stuff of proverbs:

> ‘Ἱππέας εἰς πεδίον’ προκαλῇ Σωκράτη εἰς λόγους προκαλούμενος.
>
> He who challenges Sokrates to an argument challenges ‘cavalry in the plain’.
>
> PL. *Tht.* 183d

Herodotos repeatedly mentions the Persian preference for level plains to suit their cavalry (6.102, 9.13.3); Xenophon notes that the Spartan commanders fighting in Asia Minor in the 390s considered themselves incapable of entering the plain due to the enemy's cavalry superiority (*Hell.* 3.1.5, 3.4.15). According to Diodoros, even the Macedonian pike phalanx would abandon level ground in the face of enemy horsemen. At Lamia in 322, when they saw the Thessalian cavalry of the Greek alliance, they ‘immediately withdrew from the plain to the rough high ground to gain safety for themselves’ (Diod. 18.15.4).

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[25] Xenophon repeatedly writes of the devastating effect of unspecified numbers of *psiloi* controlling high ground on the unshielded right of a marching column (*Hell.* 4.2.14, 4.3.22–23, 4.6.7–8).

[26] For a detailed examination of their methods see Spence 1993, 107–163.

The horseman’s domination of the open field shaped Greek warfare at both the strategic and the tactical level. Strategically, the mobility of cavalry turned marching columns, supply trains and ravagers into inviting targets, allowing horsemen to cripple an enemy army’s ability to operate abroad. When the Athenians launched a punitive expedition against Thessaly during the First Peloponnesian War, the enemy horsemen effectively confined them to their fortified camp; they could accomplish nothing and were eventually forced to return home (Thuc. 1.111.1). Their own cavalry was able to contain the invading Peloponnesians in a similar way during the early years of the Archidamian War (Thuc. 3.1.2). Once Thrasyboulos had scraped together a force of seventy horsemen against the oligarchs in Athens, none but the enemy cavalry dared to leave the city gates to come out against him (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.25–26).[27]

Tactically, horsemen were by far the most elusive and dangerous warrior type known. Cavalry could not be mustered in anything near the numbers of most city-states’ hoplite levies, but in their case this disparity mattered even less than it did for light-armed infantry; even small groups of mounted men could change the outcome of whole campaigns. The force of cavalry that decided the battle of Solygeia was no more than two hundred strong (Thuc. 4.42.1). It was with a similarly modest number that the Athenians hoped to tip the scales of the Sicilian Expedition in their favour (Thuc. 6.69.1, 98.1). In 369, an assault by just sixty Phleiasian horsemen routed the rearguard of the large Argive army ravaging their land (Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.4). At one point during the short-lived Theban ascendancy, the aggressive harrying tactics of fifty Syracusan horsemen forced the entire Boiotian army to conform to their will (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.21).

Combined arms tactics, then, were a vital necessity for the Greeks. As Iapichino put it, ‘in nearly every terrain’ hoplites were ‘extremely vulnerable when not supported by cavalry and light infantry’.[28] Indeed, their tactical thought centred on an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different types of warriors, and it is frequently demonstrated how much they valued a balanced army that could adapt itself to meet any requirement.[29] The reinforcements Gelon of Syracuse is said to have offered for use against the Persians in 480 consisted of sizeable units of light and heavy infantry, cavalry, archers and slingers (Hdt. 7.158.4). Xenophon’s ideal example of good order was a well-drilled force of hoplites, cavalry, and *psiloi* of all kinds (*Oik.* 8.6). Iphikrates allegedly described himself, not as a horseman or a hoplite or an archer or a peltast, but as one who could command *all* of these (Plut. *Mor.* 187b).

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[27] For descriptions of the methods used in ‘mobile defence’, see Xen. *Hipparch.* 7.6–15; Spence 1990, 97–102; Hanson 1998, 122–128, 151; Van Wees 2004, 66.

[28] Iapichino 1999, 97.

[29] Hutchinson 2000, 92–93.

Both Thucydides and Xenophon describe how generals preparing for a campaign would seek to obtain specific reinforcements based on the threats they were going to face. Demosthenes needed javelin-throwers in Aitolia (Thuc. 3.97.2); Nikias wanted long-range missile troops to ward off the horsemen of Syracuse (Thuc. 6.22); Agesilaos spent his raised a cavalry corps in Asia Minor 'so that he would not have to wage war by running away' (Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.15). The Thracian king Seuthes and the remains of the Ten Thousand made a mutually beneficial agreement in which each side supplied the warrior type that the other lacked—the Greeks offering their services as hoplites, while the Thracians offered vital protection with their cavalry and peltasts (Xen. *An.* 7.6.25–29). The Athenian general Hippokrates believed the Spartans would not dare to invade Athenian territory without the support of the Boiotian horse (Thuc. 4.95.2). When Athenian cavalry began to raid Spartan territory, the Spartans saw that even hoplites of their calibre could do nothing to hold them off; they promptly raised their own contingents of horsemen and archers to deal with the threat (Thuc. 4.55.2). Some decades later the Spartans decided to withdraw their hoplite army from Haliartos when they realised their horsemen were no match for those of their enemies (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.23). When Kallias and Iphikrates saw that the Spartan column on its way to Lechaion had no fast troops in support, they realised 'it was safe to attack them with peltasts' (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.13). Once in the service of Seuthes, Xenophon advised him to adjust his marching column based on when he would march and what sort of enemies he was likely to encounter (*An.* 7.2.37); he instructed the Athenian cavalry commander to use light infantry in close coordination with horsemen (*Hipparch.* 5.13, 8.19), and never to engage strong enemy forces without hoplite support (7.1–4). Aineias stresses the need for hoplites defending a city to sally in organised groups able to provide mutual assistance. They were to be preceded by *psiloi* and cavalry to protect their advance (15.2–5). Thus they could fall upon the enemy:

> … οὕτω χρὴ αὐτοῖς προσκεῖσθαι τοῖς μὲν ἱππεῦσιν προκαταλαμβάνοντα τὰς ἀποχωρήσεις, τοῖς δ᾽ ἐπιλέκτοις ἐνέδρας ποιούμενον, τοῖς δ᾽ ἄλλοις κούφοις ἐπιφαινόμενον αὐτοῖς, τοὺς δ᾽ ὁπλίτας ἀθρόους ἐν τάξει ἄγοντα, μὴ πόρρω δὲ τῶν προπεμφθέντων μερῶν.
>
> … attack them, cut off their retreat with your cavalry, set ambuscades of picked men, engage them with your other light troops, and bring up your hoplites *en masse* in battle formation, not far behind those already sent in.
>
> AIN. TAKT. 16.7

In other words, commanders were to make full use of the different troops at their disposal, and take care not to rely on any single one—to view their armies as limber bodies with striking hands and running feet rather than monolithic masses of armoured men.

The traditional view holds that the examples listed here do not concern pitched battles of Greek against Greek, and therefore should not affect our characterisation of Greek warfare. Skirmishes, battles on broken ground, surprise attacks, ambushes, and fights against non-Greeks did not define their way of war.[30] This strict compartmentalisation is meant to explain and justify the supposed primacy of the hoplite. However, there are several problems with this view. Firstly, pitched battles were rare, and Greek armies much more often fought less 'formal' engagements on a less impressive scale.[31] Both heavy infantry and faster troops were usually involved in such clashes, and the former tended to be at a serious disadvantage. Hoplites therefore did not single-handedly dominate Greek warfare; in fact, they were the ones who needed protection almost all of the time. Secondly, we have little reason to assume that hoplites naturally ruled supreme in the sort of pitched battles in open ground that scholars tend to regard as the true form of Greek warfare. The clashes at Spartolos (Thuc. 2.79.3–6) and Lechaion (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.11–18) showed that non-hoplite warriors were perfectly capable of breaking a formed phalanx on level ground. Through manoeuvre and the psychological effect of steady attrition, *psiloi* could demolish the finest hoplites in any terrain—a fact of fundamental importance, given that they must have frequently outnumbered the heavy infantry levy. Cavalry, meanwhile, did not need such numbers to impress. Not hoplites but horsemen ruled the plain, and they had no trouble applying their particular strengths to the conditions of pitched battle. If we reduce Greek battles to hoplite combat, we focus exclusively on just one fraction of the tactical system of which hoplites were a part. Instead, we should regard each battle in which the fighting was apparently reduced to the clash of hoplite phalanxes as one in which the decisive interference of light troops and cavalry was effectively prevented—and ask ourselves how it was done.

There are almost no known battles where a phalanx of hoplites entered the field without any other troops in support. The classic example, of course, is the battle of Marathon, which Herodotos suggests was fought entirely by heavy infantry. Yet this is the exception that proves the rule; Krentz has argued that there were very specific tactical reasons for the Athenians to make their horsemen and light troops charge with the hoplites against the Persian lines.[32] At Plataia, just over a decade later, *psiloi* are said to have significantly outnumbered hoplites in the Greek army (Hdt. 9.30). Allusions to their presence in other major campaigns suggest that this was typically the case whenever a city-state marched to war.[33] In light of this evidence, we must assume that even engagements such as the battle of Solygeia, where only hoplites are mentioned on the Corinthian side, may actually have involved significant numbers of lighter troops. In several cases where the action itself appears confined to the heavy infantry, the presence of cavalry and missile troops in the opposing armies is in fact dutifully reported. It is only in a few highly unusual cases that a phalanx found itself entirely unsupported. On Sphakteria, this happened because the Spartan garrison was forced to fight a battle it was not at all prepared for.[34] The battle of Tegyra (Plut. *Pel.* 17.2), which was even less premeditated, is the only other definite example that comes to mind. What we frequently find instead is accounts of armies failing to win battles precisely because they lacked light-armed troops of a particular kind, or because they lacked horsemen, or because their more mobile forces had been driven off.[35] Clearly the presence of such forces was essential. Greek warfare was never just about hoplites, but about the conscious and deliberate combination of different types of troops.

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[30] Droysen 1889, 94–97; Lammert 1899, 5–9; Grundy 1911, 274–275; Anderson 1970, 42; Spence 1993, 140; Sage 1996, xvii–xix; Hanson 1991b, 5–6; 2000, 209, 211. Contrast Osborne 1987, 138–140, who argued that raids and irregular operations were the principal element of Greek warfare until well into the Classical period.

[31] Anderson 1970, 111; Rawlings 2000, 234; 2007, 66–69; Echeverría 2011, 47–48.

It is crucial, therefore, not to reduce the subject of deployment for battle exclusively to the formation of the phalanx. In Iphikrates' analogy, the hoplite body was merely a rump without arms or legs. The phalanx itself will be discussed at length in the last two sections of this chapter. First is an analysis of the options available to Greeks in the deployment of their entire army. The battle array was an integrated grouping of *psiloi*, heavy infantry and cavalry, in which every troop type was expected to contribute to the best of its ability to the effort of the army as a whole.

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[32] Krentz 2010, 151; 2013b, 42–43; see also Hunt 1998, 26–28.

[33] Van Wees 2004, 65, citing evidence from the Delion campaign; note also the sudden and highly effective employment of light infantry at Megara in 457 (Thuc. 1.106.2).

[34] Samons 2006, 537.

[35] For example at Potidaia, Spartolos, Solygeia and Syracuse (Thuc. 1.62.3–6, 2.79.2–6, 4.44.1, 7.5.3); note also Xenophon's comment on the helplessness of an army without horsemen (Xen. *An.* 2.4.6), of which, as we will see in Chapter 6 below, he meant every word.

## Ways to Deploy

What types of deployment did the Greeks devise, and which did they commonly use? On this subject, scholarly views have long echoed the disappointment of the Prussians. It is still often asserted that, at least until the later stages of the Peloponnesian War, there was little for Greek generals to do beyond drawing up the phalanx and leading it into battle. All else served only to facilitate the head-on clash of the hoplites.[36] Tactically minded authors have criticised the Greeks for their failure to use light infantry and cavalry in more sophisticated ways; many have sought to characterise their warfare as ritualistic and exclusive because better tactics apparently did not emerge.[37] The Greeks' supposed failure to exploit *psiloi* in battle, their simple grouping of these troops in one way or another around the phalanx, has been treated with stern disapproval.[38] Their placement of cavalry on the flanks has sometimes been described as merely 'traditional', implying that the tactical purpose of this deployment was hardly significant.[39] Yet, in the professional armies of the Hellenistic kingdoms and in the forces of warlike Rome, the same 'primitive' patterns persisted. Light troops still lined up beside or ahead of the infantry; horsemen still guarded the flanks. Similarly, the centrality of the hoplite phalanx to all battle formations has been considered uniquely Greek, a product of polis ideology and cultural prejudice—but few variations on the theme have emerged in any culture fielding heavy infantry. Macedonians, Carthaginians and Romans, to name but a few examples, all seem to have relied on a strong central line of fighters on foot. They knew little more than the Greeks of the 'four possible battle arrays' offered by Lammert to demonstrate Greek ignorance of tactics.[40] It might help to approach this topic from a more practical military angle and ask what else the Greeks could have done.

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[36] Lammert 1899, 11; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 71–72; Adcock 1957, 6–7; Cartledge 1977, 15–16; Connor 1988, 13; Hanson 1991b, 4–5; Lendon 2005, 42; Tritle 2007b, 209.

[37] Many examples of this attitude have been cited in the historiographical overview in the Introduction; in addition, see Beloch 1897, 464–465; Lammert 1899, 9, 14–16; Grundy 1911, 272; and above, n. 2.

[38] Droysen 1889, 95–97; Delbrück 1908, 109–110, 150–151; Lippelt 1910, 35, 43–44, 51; Anderson 1970, 42; Garlan 1972, 108–109; Lazenby 1989, 76; Van Wees 1995, 162.

[39] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 182; Beck 1931, 197; Anderson 1961, 131; Cawkwell 1978, 151; Connor 1988, 13; Lazenby 1985, 159; Spence 1993, 154–155; Pritchett 1994b, 116–117; Van Wees 2004, 196; Echeverría 2011, 59–60, 75–76.

[40] Lammert 1899, 9. Indeed, Sabin (2007, 404) described the typical deployment used by Hellenistic armies as 'rather formulaic'.

Hoplites naturally served as the backbone—the 'chest and cuirass'—of any army. They alone had the ability to withstand a direct assault; when they attacked, only other hoplites could stand against them. Even in engagements where one side used only missile troops, a nearby friendly hoplite phalanx could provide an essential safeguard and base of operations, as seen on Sphakteria (Thuc. 4.33) and at Lechaion (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17). However, hoplites were also the slowest troops present, and the most vulnerable to outflanking both by the opponent's heavy infantry and by lighter troops. Their survival in pitched battle depended on their facing the enemy as an unbroken line, presenting as few opportunities as possible for attackers to strike them from the side, force them apart, or throw them into confusion.[41] Caught out of formation, they were easy prey; on the battlefield as on the march, they had to huddle together in fear of more agile troops. Meanwhile, the deliberate amateurism of the hoplite militia affected not only their tactical abilities, but also their reliability under pressure. Few hoplites had the discipline or unit cohesion to keep fighting without support. With these serious limitations in mind, the only deployment that seemed to offer some promise of safety was a continuous line of hoplites wide enough to stretch from one flank-protecting terrain feature to another, like the one the Athenians formed at Syracuse, and the Spartan-led forces hoped to deploy within the Long Walls of Corinth:

> ὡς δὲ πολὺ διεχόντων τῶν τειχῶν ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλων παραταττόμενοι ὀλίγοι ἑαυτοῖς ἔδοξαν εἶναι, σταύρωμά τ᾽ ἐποιήσαντο καὶ τάφρον οἵαν ἐδύναντο πρὸ αὑτῶν, ἕως δὴ οἱ σύμμαχοι βοηθήσοιεν αὐτοῖς.
>
> But since the walls were far apart, when they formed up they thought themselves too few, and so they made a stockade and as good a ditch as they could in front of them until their allies would come to their aid.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 4.4.9[42]

If the terrain offered no natural security, the flanks of the phalanx had to be protected in some other way. As will be discussed below, the disposition of the contingents of hoplites and their depth was determined to a great extent by the need to secure the integrity of the line.

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[41] Luginbill (1994, 57) and Crowley (2012, 49–53) sum up the evidence. This fundamental weakness of the hoplite phalanx is acknowledged by all scholars, although Echeverría (2011, 68) is right to stress that, once in combat, phalanxes could be partly routed without losing the battle altogether.

[42] For comparable situations, see Thuc. 6.66.1; Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.50; Diod. 15.93.4–5. Note also the Ten Thousand's attempts to form up with their backs to rivers (Xen. *An.* 1.10.9, 4.3.26).

The vulnerabilities of the hoplite thus led to an apparently simplistic and inflexible tactical system. This system has been wrongly interpreted as one in which mobile troops had no place; in fact it was precisely *because* light infantry and horsemen were such a serious threat that its restrictive form became a necessity. Heavily armed but untrained warriors performed best when merged into long unbroken lines drawn straight across the battlefield. This rigid core of Greek armies was as much a bulwark as it was an obstacle. If the phalanx was to be an effective armoured 'chest', no gaps could be tolerated; no other troops could be allowed to move between its parts or through it. The known variety of deployments for flexible forces was therefore limited for the same reason that it was limited in Hellenistic and Roman armies. The battle line had to be kept intact for victory to be possible. Its presence drove the other troops to fixed positions on the flanks, in front, or behind. Iphikrates' metaphor is therefore very apt; light troops and cavalry could not interfere with the phalanx they supported, like limbs cannot pass through the torso to which they are attached.

Unfortunately, our sources are not always helpful when we try to reconstruct the resulting deployments. Their focus in many major battles is on hoplites, often at the expense of other troop types that probably did take part in the fighting. We are told that fast troops were present at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.67.1), the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16–17) and Koroneia (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.15), but they completely disappear in the ensuing accounts of these fights. A number of passages make it clear that large contingents of light-armed poor habitually marched out with citizen armies, but their actions in battle are rarely reported.[43] It has been convincingly argued that this selective tradition was the result of the sociopolitical biases of the authors, who do not provide a fair account of actual battles.[44] Yet their omissions remain strange in light of their constant reference to the impact of mobile forces on a strategic and tactical level, and indeed even in some full-scale battles the decisive contribution of faster troops simply could not be left unreported. In those cases, we get a glimpse of what must have been more generally going on.[45] Accounts of smaller engagements of every kind can provide us with the rest of the image.

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[43] Hdt. 8.24–25, 9.28–30; Thuc. 1.105.6–106.2, 2.31.2, 4.93.3, 4.94.1; see Van Wees 2004, 61–62.

[44] Van Wees 1995, 162–165; 2004, 65; Hunt 1998, 2–3, 26–28, 31–32, 57–61, 144–145; Echeverría 2011, 59–60, 75–76.

[45] Hornblower (2008, 474–475) argued that Thucydides' account of the first battle at Syracuse was 'programmatic', with many features that the reader was supposed to bear in mind for other set-piece battles.

No extant manual from Classical Greece offers instructions on how to deploy an army. However, Asklepiodotos, writing in the Hellenistic period, does discuss the subject to some extent, and the forms he offers all have their parallels, and perhaps part of their origins, in Classical battle accounts. The central place of the heavy infantry phalanx is never called into question, but Asklepiodotos stresses repeatedly that missile troops and horsemen ought to be 'deployed to fit the need' (πρὸς τὰς ἁρμοζούσας χρείας [...] ταγήσονται, 6.1).[46] Thus, Classical Greek cavalry, which corresponds to the type Asklepiodotos puts on the flanks of the phalanx (1.3), was indeed often deployed to cover the ends of the line, as both sides did at Delion in 424 (Thuc. 4.93.4–94.1), and the Spartans at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.67.1) and Olynthos (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40). Sometimes it was used together with light infantry to protect one vulnerable flank, as the Syracusans did at the first battle outside their walls (Thuc. 6.67.2), and as Epameinondas did at Second Mantineia (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.24). In such a position it was of course ideally placed to outflank the enemy, unless opposing cavalry was deployed to stop them—prompting Onasander to claim that 'the general will not deploy his cavalry as he wishes, but as he is compelled' (*Strat.* 16).[47] Anderson noted that even the famous heavy cavalry of the Macedonians was primarily used to deal with the horsemen of the enemy.[48] This did not always mean, though, that they were restricted to their own separate little clash on the wings. They could also be placed in front of the phalanx, 'to draw first blood and provoke the battle' (Askl. 7.1), as at Lynkos (Thuc. 4.124.3), Tegyra (Plut. *Pel.* 17.2–3), Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10–13) and the Krimesos (Plut. *Tim.* 27.6–7); it is possible that the Greeks picked up this tactic from Persian manoeuvres at Plataia (Hdt. 9.20–23, 49–50).

In his account of the second battle of Mantineia, Xenophon stresses that cavalry should not be formed up 'like a phalanx of hoplites', all lined up together as wide as possible, as some generals would command; rather, they should be placed in a deep column with direct light infantry support (*Hell.* 7.5.23–24).[49] This deployment would allow them to surprise their enemies with unseen numbers—the horsemen's best hope of shattering their counterparts in the enemy force. Once the enemy horse were taken out of the picture, the cavalry would be free to operate with impunity.

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[46] See also Askl. 1.3, 7.1; Xen. *Hipparch.* 9.1; Spence 1993, 155.

[47] Rahe 1980, 88.

[48] Anderson 1961, 152–154.

[49] Note also his comments on Persian cavalry deployment (*Hell.* 3.4.13).

The light infantry meant to support them in this setup were the *hamippoi*, a particular type of warrior who ran along hidden between the mounted men and provided cavalry formations with a nasty secret weapon and some much-needed staying power. Unfortunately, even though the troop type seems to have been known to Herodotos (7.158.4) and Thucydides (5.57.2), Second Mantineia is the only battle in which we see them in action (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23–24; Diod. 15.85.4–5), and the extent of their role in Greek warfare remains sadly unclear.[50] All we have is Xenophon's insistence that *hamippoi* were essential to cavalry operations (*Hipparch.* 5.13, 8.18–19, 9.7)—which should probably be taken as a sign that the concept was not as widely understood as Xenophon would have liked. Indeed, if they were a common feature of Greek deployments for battle, they could hardly have served effectively as a secret weapon. It therefore seems likely that few Greek states—perhaps, in the Classical period, the Boiotians and Thessalians alone—actually fielded *hamippoi*.[51]

The fact that horsemen did nevertheless often cooperate closely with other troop types is clearly demonstrated by a common countermeasure against harassment by the enemy's hands and feet. We see this tactic used for the first time by the Spartan king Pausanias at Peiraieus in 403; its origins are unknown, but it was frequently employed afterwards by Spartan-led forces, suggesting a Spartan origin. By 381 we find their enemies at Olynthos using it against them. In his military manual of the late 360s, Aineias recommends it to his readers (16.7). The tactic is perhaps best described by the term 'cascading charge'. In such an attack, the cavalry would be sent straight against the opposing force, followed directly and at a run by the *psiloi*, who were followed in turn by the youngest of the hoplites, and finally the rest of the phalanx, each taking advantage of the impact of the preceding charge. In practice, the number of waves and their exact order could vary depending on the troops present, and young hoplites were not always separately grouped, but these variations made little difference. All the fighting would usually be done by the first few waves. No additional momentum was required.

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[50] Spence 1993, 56–60. Sekunda (2014, 60–64) assumes the Skiritai were *hamippoi*, but there does not seem to be any evidence to support this.

[51] The *Athenaion Politeia* (49.1) confirms that Athens had its own corps of *hamippoi* by the late fourth century, but it is not known when they were first raised. Xenophon's recommendations suggest that they were not yet a feature of the Athenian cavalry when he wrote the *Hipparchikos* in the late 360s.

TABLE 2 *Attestations of the cascading charge*

| Date | Place | Armies | Order of attack | Outcome | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 403 | Peiraieus | Spartans against Athenian democratic uprising | *Psiloi*<br>Hoplites under 30<br>Hoplites over 30 | Athenian rebels driven back to main body, suffering 30 dead | Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.32 |
| 401 | Upper Tigris | Ten Thousand against Persians | Cavalry<br>Peltasts<br>Hoplites | Persians routed with heavy losses including 18 cavalry | Xen. *An.* 3.4.3–4 |
| 395 | Sardis | Spartans against Persians | Cavalry<br>*Psiloi*<br>Hoplites under 30<br>Hoplites over 30 | Persians briefly resist Ionian cavalry, then collapse; Persian camp captured | Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.23 |
| 389 | Akarnania | Spartans against Akarnanians | Hoplites under 35<br>Cavalry<br>Hoplites over 35 | Akarnanians driven off | Xen. *Hell.* 4.6.10–11 |
| 381 | Olynthos | Spartans against Olynthians | Cavalry<br>*Psiloi*<br>Hoplites | Initial success, but charge stops short at Olynthian city wall, blunted by missile fire | Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.5 |
| 381 | Olynthos | Olynthians against Spartans | Cavalry<br>*Psiloi*<br>Hoplites | Spartan force routed and wiped out; Teleutias killed | Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.6 |
| 378 | Boiotia | Spartans against Thebans | Cavalry<br>Hoplites under 30<br>Hoplites over 30 | Theban cavalry driven off with 12 killed | Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.40 |
| 366 | Phleious | Athenians and Phleiasians against Sikyonians | Cavalry<br>*Epilektoi*<br>Mercenaries | Sikyonians surprised and overwhelmed; garrison fort captured | Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.21–23 |

The psychological effect of this tactic would have been devastating, as the series of successive attacks gave the enemy no time to react, and every blow struck against them was immediately followed by the next. They generally would not withstand this onslaught long enough to require the attacker to commit to hand-to-hand combat. The hoplites were explicitly sent in only to inspire confidence among the charging vanguard and a sense of dread in the target—to support, rather than be supported by, flexible troops. When Teleutias's cascading charge came up against the Olynthian city wall, he became the only commander ever to fail with this tactic (Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.5).

As for the *psiloi* themselves, Asklepiodotos (6.1) identifies four different deployments for them, and all but one are known from the Classical period.[52] Firstly, they could be placed in front of the phalanx, as the pre-battle skirmish suggests they were at Syracuse (Thuc. 6.69.2). We do not hear of such skirmishing in any other clash, but the cascading charge frequently featured light infantry attacking ahead of the hoplite force, and in the land of the Kolchians the Ten Thousand deployed a third of their *psiloi* in this position (Xen. *An.* 4.8.15).

Secondly, they could be stationed behind the battle line, where they could discharge missiles while protected by the heavy infantry, as Thrasyboulos ordered them to do with great effect in two of his battles (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.12, 15–16, 34).[53] Onomarchos of Phokis allegedly used this approach, combined with rugged terrain, to defeat Philip of Macedon (Polyain. *Strat.* 2.38.2). When forced to seek shelter within a square formation of hoplites (Thuc. 4.125.2; Xen. *An.* 3.3.7, 3.4.27), *psiloi* would in a sense be using this deployment as well.

Thirdly, they could be placed on the flanks, sometimes with the cavalry, sometimes in their own right. At Olpai (Thuc. 3.107.4) and at the Long Walls of Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9) they were part of the battle line proper, while at Delion (Thuc. 4.93.4–5), Kounaxa (Xen. *An.* 1.8.5, 1.9.7–8), Byzantion (Xen. *An.* 7.1.23), in Karia (Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.16) and at Second Mantineia (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.24) they were stationed to extend the line and prevent encirclement.

Lastly, according to Asklepiodotos, they could be deployed within the phalanx. This placement was the likely *de facto* reality of Greek warfare before the segregation of troop types on the battlefield. According to Plutarch (*Arist.* 14.3), the Athenian archers still mingled with the hoplites when the situation at Plataia called for it. There are no known examples of this practice after the Persian Wars, however—probably due to the unease Greeks would have felt at the thought of creating gaps in their line that enemy forces might exploit. Onasander also describes in detail how this deployment greatly reduced the effectiveness of the missile troops themselves (*Strat.* 17). However, one similar deployment stands out. In the land of the Mossynoikoi, the archers and peltasts of the Ten Thousand were deployed between small units of hoplites, forming a checkerboard formation (Xen. *An.* 5.4.22). This formation was a spectacular modification of phalanx warfare—notably in rugged terrain with no enemy horsemen present—but it is never again seen in the sources. The mercenary army's unique military situation and extensive shared combat experience probably allowed them to experiment with tactics that other Greeks were unable to replicate.[54]

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[52] The deployments of *psiloi* prescribed by Arrian (*Takt.* 9.1–2, 13.1–2) are identical to those found in Asklepiodotos.

[53] Xenophon (*Kyr.* 6.3.24) has Kyros recommend this deployment of *psiloi* for pitched battle.

It may be true that, confined by terrain and advancing phalanxes, *psiloi* could not accomplish much. The Greeks can hardly be faulted for this; Hellenistic tacticians like Asklepiodotos apparently could not think of ways to use light troops in battle that their Classical counterparts had not at some point attempted in practice. There were only so many ways to work around a phalanx. But it is important to ask whether the small number of possible deployments really reflected a way of war dominated by the hoplite. We should bear in mind the tactics of the *psiloi* on Sphakteria and elsewhere: with a startling sense of purpose they exploited precisely the weaknesses that forced the hoplites to deploy as they did. Realising their predicament, the Spartans on the island tried as hard as they could to reduce the battle to a clash of rival phalanxes. Their failure to do so ultimately caused their defeat (Thuc. 4.33.1).[55] Like cavalry, *psiloi* could take complete control of a battle if the hoplites were not careful. It is in this light that we should see the premium Greek armies placed on protective terrain features and horsemen guarding their flanks.

In addition to all these variations in forming up for battle, it was a well-established tactic to hold troops in reserve. These could be used to protect the main line and to intervene decisively in a later stage of the battle:

> δοκεῖ μοι, ὦ ἄνδρες στρατηγοί, ἐπιτάξασθαι τῇ φάλαγγι λόχους φύλακας ἵν' ἄν που δέῃ ὦσιν οἱ ἐπιβοηθήσοντες τῇ φάλαγγι καὶ οἱ πολέμιοι τεταραγμένοι ἐμπίπτωσιν εἰς τεταγμένους καὶ ἀκεραίους.
>
> It seems to me, generals, that we should draw up guard units behind our phalanx, so that in case of need we have men to come to its aid, and the enemy in disarray will run into well-ordered, intact troops.
>
> XEN. *An.* 6.5.9[56]

This was also the apparent function of the Athenian archers at Plataia: to act as a mobile 'fire brigade' and appear wherever they were needed (Hdt. 9.22.2, 9.60). Xenophon notes that one of the strengths of horsemen is their ability to strike promptly at any apparent weakness (*Hipparch.* 7.8), and Thucydides reports that part of the Athenian cavalry at Delion were given orders to do exactly that (4.93.2). The Spartan-led coalition inside the Long Walls of Corinth intended to use its cavalry in the same way (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10). According to Diodoros, the Spartans held back a unit of Eleian cavalry at Second Mantineia, which was committed just in time to prevent the left wing of the coalition army from crumbling (15.85.8). In these particular instances, the unit in reserve was light and mobile, but it could just as easily be a formation of hoplites, like the ones referred to in the Anabasis passage cited above. The Corinthians saved their left wing with a unit of hoplite reinforcements at Solygeia (Thuc. 4.43.4). During the first battle at Syracuse, the Athenians set aside half of their hoplites to act as a reserve (Thuc. 6.67.1). Alexander held a third of his men in reserve during the siege of Thebes in 335 (Diod. 17.11.1). In each case, the point of the arrangement was both to support the line and to break the enemy's resolve at the right time. Thucydides has Brasidas explain:

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[54] Whitby 2004, 239–240; Lee 2007, 88.

[55] Lazenby 1985, 117; Hornblower 1996, 190.

[56] See Onasander, *Strat.* 22.1; Wheeler 2007c, 219.

> ἐλπὶς γὰρ μάλιστα αὐτοὺς οὕτω φοβηθῆναι: τὸ γὰρ ἐπιὸν ὕστερον δεινότερον τοῖς πολεμίοις τοῦ παρόντος καὶ μαχομένου.
>
> This is our best hope to frighten them, for those who show up later are more terrifying to an enemy than those he is already fighting.
>
> THUC. 5.9.8[57]

Again, this recurrent tactic illustrates the vulnerability of the hoplite. In each example, the force to be supported, the force that is expected to waver or to be unable to withstand a second onslaught, is the heavy infantry of the battle line. They were the ones who needed help, and help was offered to them in any way the terrain and the available forces allowed.

In short, the sources show clearly that hoplites did not fight alone. And how could they? The phalanx could be a daunting force in battle, but in all too many situations it was effectively reduced to a helpless mass. Even as a bulwark against cavalry, it was far from perfect; a gathering of amateurs, it had to maintain its cohesion to survive, and it lacked the ability to strike at range. It had to be protected as much as it could protect. With very few exceptions, Greek battles therefore involved formations of different troop types supporting each other to make up for obvious weaknesses: hoplites guarded mobile troops against direct assault, while cavalry and *psiloi* guarded hoplites against missile attacks and flanking manoeuvres. This division of labour was necessitated by the hoplites' constant and justified fear of being caught at a disadvantage. They used all available means to keep enemy missile troops and horsemen at arm's length until they could engage the opposing phalanx. As we will see in Chapter 6, they also depended on horsemen to protect them if the battle did not go their way. The matter of deploying the army therefore went far beyond the mere arrangement of the hoplite phalanx—which was itself in part a tactical response to the war-winning potential of lighter troops.

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[57] This is seen in practice at Hdt. 6.29.1; Thuc. 3.108.1, 4.96.5–6, 5.73.2–3.

## Positions of Honour

The deployment of the hoplite force was a question all of its own. Phalanxes were rarely uniform bodies of men; most major Greek battles were fought by coalition armies, in which the participants fielded as many hoplites as they were able or required to provide. These tended to fight together as city-state units, side by side with the forces of their allies. Much thought was given to the ideal placement of these contingents in a line. What principles lay behind the drawing up of particular troops in particular positions?

For the decisive battle of Plataia, the Greeks managed to assemble a vast allied army in which the hoplites of dozens of states were represented. None questioned the leadership of the Spartans in this campaign; it was therefore tacitly accepted that they should hold the right wing of the line. But the honour of holding the left wing was disputed (Hdt. 9.26–28; Plut. *Arist.* 12.1–3). We are told that the Tegeans and the Athenians vied with each other for the privilege, recounting ancient deeds of valour to determine who deserved to hold the position. In the end, 'the whole army shouted that the Athenians were more worthy' (Hdt. 9.28.1), and they got the left wing. Still, the Spartans deployed the Tegeans directly to their own left 'to honour them' (Hdt. 9.28.3). It was not until all this had been resolved that the army could form up for battle.

This passage seems to establish beyond a doubt the primacy of honour in the decision-making process, trumping any tactical considerations. It presents the right wing as the position of highest honour, preserved for the leaders of the alliance; the extreme left wing was apparently second in honour, and the place next to the extreme right was third. Indeed, the main contributor of hoplites is often found on the right wing of the line in battles of the Classical period; it is where the Thebans were at Delion (Thuc. 4.93.4–5), the Spartans at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.16), and both Thebans and Spartans at Koroneia (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.15). Herodotos states that it was traditional for the Athenian polemarch to lead from the right (6.111.1). Thucydides adds another layer to these conventions when he notes that the Mantineians held the allied right at First Mantineia because the battle took place in their land (5.67.2).

Modern authors have held these to be the cast-iron rules of hoplite warfare. The Prussian model of phalanx battle assumed the best troops were always deployed on the right. Lendon has recently elaborated once again the watertight sorting algorithm of honour by which contingents would be assigned their proper place in the phalanx, with the leaders invariably holding the right wing.[58] It has been noted above how the Theban deployment on the left at Leuktra to this day inspires scholarly awe as a supposedly groundbreaking innovation. When the surviving accounts of a particular battle lack sufficient detail, authors still take it for granted that the army's best troops must have been deployed on the right.[59] The position of honour is sometimes given some practical justification by combining the passages above with Thucydides' famous observation that hoplites were inclined to drift to the right in battle, seeking safety for their unshielded sides; those on the right flank had to show restraint to keep the whole line from disintegrating, and simultaneously faced the greatest danger on their own unprotected right.[60] The nature of hoplite equipment thus prescribed the standard Herodotean deployment. The honour gained by holding the position was the reward for braving its dangers; only the best and most deserving could hold the right wing.

But if we look at the sources more closely, there is little to be seen of this clear-cut principle. The scene at Plataia is the only known debate over who deserved to be honoured by which place in the line. Furthermore, at that very battle, the Greeks proceeded to show complete indifference to the matter of right and left. According to Herodotos (9.46–47), when they discovered that the Persians had matched their finest soldiers against the Spartans on the right wing, they decided it would be wiser to move the Athenians to that position, since the Athenians had beaten the Persians once before. The Spartans would be of more use on the left, facing the Persians' Greek allies. But the Persians saw them swap the contingents around and immediately followed suit. Realising the futility of rearranging themselves in plain sight of the enemy, the Greeks went on to restore their original line. Now, considering the sheer number of men involved and the proximity of the enemy, it seems unlikely that this double exchange of flanks really took place. The important thing is that Herodotos felt it was worth including in his work. He saw no reason for the Greeks to stick to their carefully determined positions of honour if the conditions of battle required that they be adjusted. According to him, the Athenians were afraid to make the suggestion, thinking the Spartans would be displeased—but then the Spartans raised the issue themselves (9.46.3).

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[58] Lendon 2005, 41–42; see Lammert 1899, 18–20; Delbrück 1908, 161; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 84; Grundy 1911, 270–271; Ducrey 1985, 66; Schwartz 2009, 233–234; Echeverría 2011, 68.

[59] For example Ray (2009, 136) for the battle of Tanagra, and Lazenby (2004, 100) for the battle of Laodokeion in 423/2.

[60] Droysen 1889, 92; Cawkwell 1972, 260–261; Wheeler 2007c, 216; Schwartz 2009, 172–175; Echeverría 2011, 55–56.

Indeed, Spartan commanders appear to have had no qualms about leading from the left. Knemos, for example, did so during his advance on Stratos in 429 (Thuc. 2.81.3). Thucydides gives no reason for his choice, which may make it seem like mere happenstance, but it may also mean that he saw no need to justify an apparently unremarkable fact. He certainly did not play it up when it occurred again at the battle of Olpai (3.107.4). Modern analyses of this battle tend to focus on the ambush by which the outnumbered Demosthenes won the day; few scholars seem to have realised that the enemy commander, the Spartan Eurylochos, deliberately massed his best troops on the left to engage Demosthenes' own contingent directly.[61] Xenophon reports how the assault on Olynthos in 382 gave the Spartan commander Teleutias another practical reason to put himself and his best troops on the left:

> … ἔθετο τὰ ὅπλα, εὐώνυμον μὲν αὐτὸς ἔχων, οὕτω γὰρ συνέβαινεν αὐτῷ κατὰ τὰς πύλας ἰέναι ᾗ ἐξῇσαν οἱ πολέμιοι, ἡ δ' ἄλλη φάλαγξ τῶν συμμάχων ἀπετέτατο πρὸς τὸ δεξιόν.
>
> … he halted the army, with himself on the left, for in this way he would be the one to attack the gate from which the enemy would sally, while the rest of the phalanx of the allies stretched away to the right.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 5.2.40

Nothing suggests that Teleutias sacrificed honour for expedience. In fact, in this very passage, he is said to have deployed the cavalry of his Elimian ally Derdas by his side on the left flank, 'partly because he admired these horsemen and partly *to do honour to Derdas*, so that he would be glad to be there' (διά τε τὸ ἄγασθαι τοῦτο τὸ ἱππικὸν καὶ διὰ τὸ θεραπεύειν τὸν Δέρδαν, ὡς ἡδόμενος παρείη). The principle is the same as that seen at Plataia, where the Spartans wished to please the Tegeans by placing them at their side—but at Olynthos the honour came from being on the extreme left. Clearly there was more to the question of honour through deployment than a simple preference for the right wing.[62]

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[61] See for instance Delbrück 1908, 117; Grundy 1911, 270–271; Best 1969, 18–19; Hornblower 1991, 532; Van Wees 2004, 132, 135, 196; Lazenby 2004, 64.

Certain major pitched battles complicate the picture even more. The finest troops of the allied army at Mantineia were the Thousand of Argos, elite hoplites maintained at the expense of the state to lead the Argive army into battle. Yet these men were deployed third from the right, not even in the second or third place of honour as defined by Herodotos. The Spartan deployment is even more peculiar: neither the Spartan king nor his local allies were deployed on the right wing. This engagement was what Lazenby called ‘the classic hoplite battle’,[63] yet its champions held the *centre* of their phalanx, with several allied contingents stationed to their right, and an unspecified ‘few Lakedaimonians’ at the extreme end of the line (Thuc. 5.67.1). Van Wees has shown that this second detachment of Spartans may in fact have been of considerable size,[64] but king Agis was certainly not with them, and there is no indication that the force was entitled to special honours for being where they were. Effectively the Spartans split up their own contingent to cover both the centre and the right of their line—but it was the former position they privileged, and that was where their commander fought. The men on the far right may have done no more than serve the purpose suggested above, to protect the flank and keep the phalanx from drifting too far to the right.

First Mantineia is not the only example of main contingents leading their phalanx from the centre. The Athenians at Syracuse placed themselves there too, with their Argive allies holding the right (Thuc. 6.67.1). At the Long Walls of Corinth, the Argives held the centre against the men of Sikyon, with the Corinthians—in their own territory—taking the left wing; the supposed position of honour was held by Iphikrates and his mercenary peltasts, an allied garrison in Corinth and a force entirely unsuited for battle in such a confined space (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9). Again, neither Thucydides nor Xenophon apparently felt this was worth any additional comment.[65] In fact, the latter author was happy to consider the practical advantages of this deployment:

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[62] According to Diodoros (13.39.4), the Spartans also led from the left at the naval battle of Kynossema in 411, though Xenophon does not report this.

[63] Lazenby 1985, 125.

[64] Van Wees 2004, 245–247.

[65] Phalanxes were also commanded from the centre at Second Mantineia in 362 (Diod. 15.85.2), where the Mantineians were again stationed on the right of the line, and at the battle at the Krimesos on Sicily in 339 (Plut. *Tim.* 27.4).

> … πάντες δ᾽ οἱ τῶν βαρβάρων ἄρχοντες μέσον ἔχοντες τὸ αὑτῶν ἡγοῦνται, νομίζοντες οὕτω καὶ ἐν ἀσφαλεστάτῳ εἶναι, ἢν ᾖ ἡ ἰσχὺς αὐτῶν ἑκατέρωθεν, καὶ εἴ τι παραγγεῖλαι χρῄζοιεν, ἡμίσει ἂν χρόνῳ αἰσθάνεσθαι τὸ στράτευμα.
>
> … all the commanders of the barbarians lead from the centre, thinking that this is the safest position, having their forces on either side of them, and also that if they want to pass down an order, the army will get it in half the time.
>
> XEN. *An.* 1.8.22

This analysis is purely tactical. Even if the commanders involved are Persian, the author clearly saw an opportunity here to examine the advantages of their method. Nothing suggests that considerations of honour should make this Persian habit unthinkable for Greeks.

Placement of the best troops on the left evokes similar indifference, to the point where the fact becomes entirely implicit. Thucydides' description of the battle of Solygeia (4.43–44) is an interesting example. For unknown reasons, the Athenians ordered their allies to disembark on the right, which meant that their own men formed the centre and left of the line. The Corinthians struck first against the Athenian right, where the allies were stationed, suggesting that the left was the leading wing of the Corinthian army. The Corinthians further reinforced this wing with a reserve unit of hoplites led by one of the two generals present. Thucydides, however, makes no fuss over either army's deployment, and readers are left to deduce for themselves what the battle lines must have looked like.[66] The same casual treatment has made Thucydides' account of the battle of Potidaia (1.62–63) something of a mystery. In the Peloponnesian army, the commander Aristeus was on one wing, and the Potidaians on the other—but neither wing is explicitly named. Going by Thucydides' principle that those fighting in their own land should hold the right (5.67.2), the Potidaians ought to have been on the right wing in this battle outside their own city, which would mean that Aristeus and his best troops led from the left. Was this how the Athenian general Kallias was killed? There is nothing in the account to confirm or deny it.

Xenophon treats such things in much the same way. He mentions casually, and feels no need to stress, that the Thirty at Mounichia placed themselves on the left side of their fifty-deep column (*Hell.* 2.4.13). He notes that the Boiotians at the Nemea refused to fight until they got the right wing, so that they would not have to face the Spartans (*Hell.* 4.2.17–18), but he does not spell out that their turn to command put the far stronger Athenian contingent on the left. In his descriptions of Leuktra and Second Mantineia, where the Thebans famously massed themselves on the left wing, he does not even bother to say so.[67] Diodoros, in fact, continued this tradition by failing to mention on which wing Alexander and Philip were respectively stationed at the decisive battle of Chaironeia in 338.[68]

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[66] The implications of Thucydides' account were first noted by Hanson (1988, 194).

TABLE 3 *Known or implied commander's positions in land battles*

| Date | Place | Army | Led from | Notes | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 490 | Marathon | Athenians | Right | | Hdt. 6.111.1 |
| 479 | Plataia | Greeks | Right | Spartans willing to lead from left | Hdt. 9.26–28, 46–47 |
| 457 | Oinophyta | Athenians | Left | | Polyain. *Strat.* 1.35.1 |
| 432 | Potidaia | Potidaians | Left? | If Potidaians were on right, Corinthians led from left. Athenian command position unknown | Thuc. 1.62–63 |
| 429 | Stratos | Peloponnesians | Left | | Thuc. 2.81.3 |
| 426 | Olpai | Athenians | Right | | Thuc. 3.107.4 |
| | | Peloponnesians | Left | | |
| 425 | Solygeia | Athenians | Centre/left | | Thuc. 4.43.2–4 |
| | | Corinthians | Left? | Initial attack launched against Athenian right | |
| 424 | Delion | Boiotians | Right | | Thuc. 4.93.4 |
| | | Athenians | Centre? | Battle began with Athenian general mid-speech somewhere along the line | Thuc. 4.94.2, 96.1 |

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[67] At Leuktra, he notes (*Hell.* 6.4.12) that the Thebans concentrated their forces against the Spartan king; we rely on Plutarch (*Pel.* 23.1) to confirm that the king was on the right, and the Thebans therefore on the left. At Second Mantineia, Xenophon is disappointingly vague, saying only that Epameinondas massed his men 'on his own wing' and routed his enemies 'where he struck' (*Hell.* 7.5.22, 24). Diodoros (15.85.2, 86.2) gives us the details.

[68] Diod. 16.86.1; his account of the Greek deployment in the ensuing paragraph is similarly vague. Was this the result of Diodoros' indifference, or did his sources also neglect to record these facts?

TABLE 3 *Known or implied commander's positions in land battles* (cont.)

| Date | Place | Army | Led from | Notes | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 422 | Amphipolis | Athenians | Right | | Thuc. 5.10.4, 9 |
| 418 | Mantineia | Argives | Centre | | Thuc. 5.67.1–2 |
| | | Spartans | Centre | | |
| 415 | Syracuse | Athenians | Centre | Syracusan command position unknown | Thuc. 6.67.1 |
| 414 | Syracuse | Athenians | Left? | Lamachos, the only named general, deployed on left | Thuc. 6.101.6 |
| 403 | Mounichia | Thirty of Athens | Left | | Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.13 |
| 401 | Kounaxa | Ten Thousand | Right | Army led from centre, but Greek phalanx on right wing led from its right | Xen. *An.* 1.8.4 |
| 394 | Nemea | Allies | Right | Commanding contingent was third strongest | Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.17–18 |
| | | Spartans | Right | | |
| 394 | Koroneia | Boiotians | Right | | Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.15 |
| | | Spartans | Right | | |
| 392 | Long Walls of Corinth | Argives | Centre | Athenian mercenary peltasts on right | Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9 |
| | | Spartans | Right | | |
| 382 | Olynthos | Spartans | Left | | Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.40 |
| 371 | Leuktra | Boiotians | Left | | Plut. *Pel.* 23.1 |
| | | Spartans | Right | | |
| 362 | Mantineia | Boiotians | Left | | Diod. 15.85.2, 86.2 |
| | | Spartans | Centre | | |
| 339 | Krimesos | Sicilian Greeks | Centre | | Plut. *Tim.* 27.4 |

When we consider all examples from the Classical period where a commander's place in the battle line is stated or implied (Table 3), it becomes easier to understand the indifference of our sources to the varied deployments they report. Far from sticking to the right wing as a general rule, Greek commanders seem to have led from this position in only a minority of cases. Leading from the left was almost as common, and a central command position was adopted at one time or another by Argives, Athenians, Spartans and Syracusans alike. If Polyainos (1.35.1) and Frontinus (2.4.11) preserve a genuine tradition about Oinophyta, examples of Greek armies being led from the left stretch back to the middle of the fifth century. It should not surprise us, then, that the Greeks found nothing remarkable about armies being led from the centre or left.

Given the ubiquity of such arrangements, and given that it was apparently even possible to gain honour specifically by being placed on the left wing, we may be forgiven for thinking that there really were no rules or traditions governing the deployment of the phalanx. But this conclusion makes the scene at Plataia difficult to understand. If it was normal for hoplite formations to be led from whichever position seemed expedient, why did the Greeks take it for granted that the Spartans would be on the right? Why did the Athenians and Tegeans debate over positions of secondary and tertiary honour? The answer lies in the pattern that emerges from the examples cited here, and it is possible to construct a model into which they all fit.

For this model we must return to Thucydides’ rightward drift. If he is correct in his claim that phalanxes tended to shift to the side as they advanced, then any two opposing battle lines would eventually end up misaligned; the two extreme right wings would see no one in front of them, while the extreme left wings would find themselves badly outflanked. The right wings could then wheel inward and begin to roll up the enemy line. This mutual outflanking indeed appears to have been a feature of several major battles, and various tactics were devised to deal with it, as we will see in the following chapter. What matters here is the basic fact. If the very mechanics of battle gave the right wing an advantage, it was there, inevitably, that the enemy would be routed first—and it was there that the battle would be decided. All else being equal, to hold the right was to get the glory.[69] It was only fair to grant this glory either to the leaders of an alliance or to the people fighting for their homes.

But all else was not always equal. According to Herodotos, fear of an unfamiliar enemy inspired the Spartans to propose the flank swap at Plataia (9.46.1). In their original deployment, they and their Tegean allies had the honour of holding the right wing, but there would obviously be more glory in defeating other Greeks than in being defeated by the Persians. At Olpai, the principle of concentrating force against the enemy’s strongest unit coincided neatly with a chance for Eurylochos to crush Messenian rebels and Athenian hoplites—the latter being the very men who proved so elusive to the Peloponnesian army that marched into Attika every year. At First Mantineia, again, the real enemies of the Spartans were the Argives, who dared to challenge their supremacy over the Peloponnese. The Argives yielded their right wing to the Mantineians and placed themselves in the centre; they put the Athenians, with whom the Spartans were formally at peace, on their far left (Thuc. 5.67.2). To settle the business properly, the Spartans therefore had to deploy in the centre and try to face the Argives head-on. When king Agis realised that his left was about to be encircled by the Mantineians, he did not try to shift his whole line to face them; instead, rather bizarrely, he marched his left wing further out to deal with the threat, calling on troops from the extreme right to march all the way down the line and fill the resulting gap (Thuc. 5.71.2–3)—all to make sure he himself would not be seen marching away from his target, the Argives. At Syracuse, the situation was more straightforward: the terrain prevented any rightward drift or outflanking move, so the Athenians formed up in the centre to bear the brunt of the frontal assault. The battlefield between the Long Walls of Corinth was similarly restricted, and the Corinthians seem to have been given the left flank to confront the Spartans directly in a fight over their very independence (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.9). At Leuktra, the Thebans meant to decide the issue by 'conquering those around the king' (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12); they therefore deployed in deep formation on the left. Their victory won them greater honour and fame than any other Classical hoplite force.

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[69] The thought process is described in Echeverría 2011, 69–70.

Of course, some of the motivations suggested here are only conjecture. The sources tend to focus on practical reasons to pick a particular deployment, if they explain the decision at all. However, it is revealing that every time the best hoplites are placed somewhere other than the right, it is always for the same reason: to oppose the enemy army's most important troops. Here, tactical considerations coincided with matters of honour.[70] The position of honour is more correctly defined as the position where the battle might be won. If the aim was to overthrow the enemy's best troops, then the position of honour would naturally be opposite those men, and that would be where the general placed himself. Battles in which the general's position was determined in this way could still devolve into a partial victory on the right for both sides, but it was no longer the primary aim, and the matter of honour through deployment was resolved in a different way. This was as true at Plataia as it was at Olynthos. At Plataia, regardless of how much was inserted by Herodotos,[71] the Spartans must have been aware of the Persian deployment in the valley below; therefore both the improbable story of the swapping of flanks *and* the original Spartan claim to the right wing represented the tactical choice to match Greece’s finest against the core of the Persian force. The relative honour of places in the line was made to match this choice, and Herodotos’ tale only took this fact one step further. At Olynthos, Teleutias honoured his allies with a place by his side, where they might share in the victory; in the event, their timely charge decided the battle (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.42).

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[70] Note Rüstow and Köchly's cynical comment (1852, 143) that 'the sacrifices would of course recommend whatever order seemed most expedient in light of the enemy's dispositions and other circumstances'.

[71] The entire debate over the army's deployment has long been regarded as an invention serving to increase the glory of Athens. See Macan 1908b, 690–691; Solmsen 1944, 249; Nyland 1992, 88; Evans 1993, 279–280; Flower 2000, 78–79.

It seems, then, that there were two basic arrangements for the constituent parts of a coalition phalanx. Which one was selected depended on how the general intended to win. If the plan was to rely on the natural extension of the right wing to encircle the enemy, then the best troops would be deployed there, with the left wing being at times completely neglected; in theory the danger incurred there should entitle its guardians to honour, but often what happened on the left flank was a matter of little concern. If, on the other hand, the commander meant for his best troops to face and defeat a specific part of the enemy force, then the entire phalanx would be formed up accordingly. The best hoplites would win the honour by fighting the toughest fight.

Herodotos’ accounts of Marathon and Plataia suggest that the first of these deployments was perhaps traditional, but the supposed swapping of flanks at the latter clash shows that at least by his own time the second type was well understood. The point of this whole operation, after all, was to match strength against strength.[72] As early as the battle of Olpai it was possible for commanders to anticipate this deployment and prepare against it; Eurylochos massed his best men on the left, but Demosthenes planted a hidden force to strike them in the rear as they encircled him. This observation should serve as a warning to us not to presume to know the details of battles for which the deployment is not spelled out. Consider for example the battle of Tanagra:

> γενομένης δὲ μάχης ἐν Τανάγρᾳ τῆς Βοιωτίας ἐνίκων Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι, καὶ φόνος ἐγένετο ἀμφοτέρων πολύς.

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[72] Grundy (1901, 477) suggested that some irrecoverable manoeuvre lay at the root of the story reported by Herodotos; he was followed in this by Macan (1908b, 691) and more recently Nyland (1992, 88–89). I do not think this is likely, given the low level of Greek organisation apparent throughout Herodotos’ account of Plataia. However, the deployment itself already reveals a principle of Greek tactical thinking, and the story about the swapping of the flanks shows that Herodotos was aware of this principle.

> When the battle was fought at Tanagra in Boiotia, the Lakedaimonians and their allies won, and there was much slaughter on both sides.
>
> THUC. 1.108.1

The 'slaughter on both sides' gives no indication of the battle's actual course. The casualties could have been caused by a mutual outflanking, or by a bitter fight between opposing lines of Athenians and Spartans. Both types of deployment were clearly used, in all possible combinations, throughout the Classical period, and rarely provoked special comment in our sources. Some battles saw both armies focus their strength on the right; some involved two commanders placing the best troops on a collision course; some battles, such as Olpai and Leuktra, saw generals deliberately exploiting the choices they expected their opponents to make.

## The Depth of the Line

Apart from its arrangement by contingent, the other major feature of a hoplite formation's deployment was its depth—that is, the number of its ranks or 'shields', one behind the other. This seemingly simple matter has provoked a vast amount of scholarly debate over the years. At the heart of the problem is the fact—noted with bafflement by Delbrück and others—that our sources rarely discuss the options and never proclaim a standard depth.[73] Many different depths are attested, from a single rank to a hundred, and scholars disagree over what exact purpose they served.

Pritchett has helpfully catalogued all the different numbers of ranks mentioned by the ancients.[74] Table 4 collects the entries related to the Classical period. One thing is immediately obvious: a depth of eight is the most widely attested. Many figures are only seen once or twice, but there are eight instances of eight ranks according to Pritchett's table.[75]

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[73] Delbrück 1908, 149; Pritchett 1971, 140–141.

[74] Pritchett 1971, 135–137.

[75] Pritchett 1971, 135. Matthew, who has recently drawn up a new list of attested depths (2012, 174), comes to a total of ten examples of an eight-deep phalanx, using evidence from the anonymous *Excerpts of Polyainos* and from the *Stratagems* by Leo the Emperor. The edition and translation of these texts by Krentz and Wheeler (1994, 850–1075) was not yet available to Pritchett. The passages Matthew cites, however, are of doubtful value. They both clearly describe the same stratagem, but the battle in which it is used is neither named nor dated. Polyainos (*Excerpts* 37.3) ascribes the stratagem to Klearchos,

Scholars have therefore assumed that eight shields, however tacitly, was the standard depth of the phalanx. Rüstow and Köchly believed that this standard was indispensable for the performance of formation evolutions; they declared any other number to be either a manipulation of this figure or a strange aberration.[76] The number eight is of course mathematically convenient, leading Hellenistic tacticians to posit mechanical deployments for both spearmen and *psiloi* of eight or sixteen ranks (Askl. 2.7, 4.4, 6.2; Arr. *Takt.* 9.6)—but we may wonder whether these perfect models applied to reality, and if so, whether they applied to Classical Greece. It is difficult to impose parade ground standards on untrained militia. Others have therefore chosen the less tactically anachronistic option of suggesting an informal convention: a depth of eight was 'normal', 'customary', 'the most common', 'the *Urtiefe*', 'regular', 'conventional' or 'the favoured depth'—implying that all other depths were mere deviations from the norm.[77] This practice has become so widely accepted that the eight-rank standard is now usually assumed to apply whenever the sources are silent.

However, some authors have taken a different approach. While accepting that a depth of eight was common, Delbrück noted that to uphold this depth as a fixed standard would be 'arbitrary'. Kromayer and Veith believed in a 'depth of ranks determined by the circumstances'; Lazenby described the phalanx as 'eight, twelve or more deep, as the case might be'. Christopher Matthew stressed that the number of ranks was 'variable' and wondered whether there might have been 'a "commonly used" depth of deployment rather than a "standard" depth'.[78]

What has provoked such scholarly caution? First of all, in the vast majority of cases, the sources actually do not tell us the depth of a given phalanx. More or less specific numbers of ranks are mentioned twenty times—but hundreds of engagements, great and small, are known from the Classical period. We can only declare a depth of eight to be standard if we assume that our tiny sample of attested depths is representative. Moreover, if we choose to do so, we still have to account for the fact that, if we divide the known figures into 'eight' and

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while Leo (*Strat.* 19.1) ascribes it to Iphikrates. At best, the two passages refer to one otherwise unknown engagement; at worst, the entire story is apocryphal. Due to its many uncertainties, I have decided to leave it out of my analysis here.

[76] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 118–120.

[77] Lammert 1899, 18; Grundy 1911, 269; How 1923, 121–122; Adcock 1957, 84; Pritchett 1971, 137–140; Holladay 1982, 95 n. 6; Ducrey 1985, 64; Connor 1988, 12; Cawkwell 1989, 380; Hanson 1989, 171; Van Wees 2004, 185; Lee 2006, 483, 486; 2013, 152; Wheeler 2007c, 206; Cartledge 2009, 362; Crowley 2012, 53, 62.

[78] Delbrück 1908, 149; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 29; Lazenby 1985, 37; Matthew 2012, 176.

TABLE 4 *Attested phalanx depths for historical battles and campaigns*

| Source | Depth | Place | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Thuc. 4.93.4 | 25 | Delion, 424 | Theban contingent only; other Boiotians deployed 'as they pleased' |
| Thuc. 4.94.1 | 8 | | |
| Thuc. 5.68.3 | ±8 | Mantineia, 418 | Depth varied from *lochos* to *lochos* |
| Thuc. 6.67.1 | 8 | Syracuse, 415 | |
| Thuc. 6.67.2 | 16 | | |
| Isok. 6.99 | 1 | Dipaia, 471 | Featured in a list of heroic Spartan exploits |
| Xen. *An.* 1.2.15 | 4 | Tyriaeion, 401 | Parade-ground deployment to impress the queen of Kilikia |
| Xen. *An.* 7.1.22–23 | 8 | Byzantion, 399 | |
| Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11 | >50 | Mounichia, 403 | Literally 'not less than fifty'; formation width restricted by terrain |
| Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.12 | <10 | | Literally 'not more than ten' |
| Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34 | 8 | Peiraieus, 403 | |
| Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.16 | 8 | Maeander, 399 | Specific order to form up 8 deep |
| Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18 | 16 | Nemea, 394 | Intended depth for whole allied army; Thebans instead deployed 'extremely deep' |
| Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.21 | 8 | Kerkyra, 373 | Mercenaries attempted to double depth to 16 |
| Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12 | <12 | Leuktra, 371 | Literally 'not more than twelve' |
| Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12 | >50 | | Literally 'not less than fifty' |
| Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.19 | 9–10 | Mantineia, 370 | Literally 'nine or ten shields' |
| Diod. 13.72.5 | 4 | Athens, 408 | Spartan display of numerical strength |
| Polyain. *Strat.* 2.1.24 | 2 | Thebes, 394 | |
| Polyain. *Strat.* 2.2.9 | 8 | Thrace, 402 | |

'not eight', the resulting ratio is 1:1.5.[79] None of these figures is accorded special status by the ancients themselves.

In addition, specific information about phalanx depths only starts to appear in the late fifth century. The earliest surviving reliable example of an eight-deep hoplite formation is the Athenian line at Delion in 424. Herodotos mentions variations in the depth of the Athenian deployment at Marathon, but at no point in his work does he ever state how deep any battle formation actually was. Even if we suppose a standard of eight, can we be confident that this standard applied before the Peloponnesian War? Theories regarding the deployment of the Spartan contingent at Plataia have been built on the assumption that their formation would have been eight deep,[80] but the earliest example of an approximately eight-deep Spartan phalanx is at First Mantineia in 418 (Thuc. 5.68.3). Is it safe to assume, as Cawkwell did, that this deployment was their ‘steady practice’ at the time?[81]

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[79] If we include unspecific indications of depth under 'not eight', the ratio becomes 1:2.25. Pritchett himself (1971, 137) still regarded these as 'numerous "exceptions"'. What he meant to imply by placing quotation marks around the word 'exceptions' is obscure.

A look at the sources can only increase our doubts about the existence of a standard depth. When the ancients elaborate on the number of ranks in a phalanx, the details they offer demonstrate a blatant lack of uniformity. According to Thucydides, when the Boiotian army deployed for the battle of Delion, ‘the Thebans formed up twenty-five shields deep, the rest as they pleased’ (4.93.4). Xenophon reports how the anti-Spartan alliance had to decide on a common depth before the battle of the Nemea, to prevent contingents making up their own minds and endangering the integrity of the phalanx (*Hell.* 4.2.13). On the day itself, the Thebans ignored the decision (4.2.18). We might expect the Spartan army to show greater discipline in these matters, but at First Mantineia they let us down:

> … ἐτάξαντο μὲν οὐ πάντες ὁμοίως, ἀλλ’ ὡς λοχαγὸς ἕκαστος ἐβούλετο, ἐπὶ πᾶν δὲ κατέστησαν ἐπὶ ὀκτώ.
>
> … although they were not all drawn up in the same depth, but as each *lochagos* wanted, on the whole they were ranged eight deep.
>
> THUC. 5.68.3

When describing the deployment of Agesilaos’ army in Mantineian territory in 370, Xenophon could say no more than that it was formed up ‘nine or ten shields deep’ (*Hell.* 6.5.19).

Passages like these make it sound like even a confident verdict of ‘eight deep’, when it occurs in the sources, is in reality at best an approximation. In fact, many indications of depth are less precise than they appear. At Mounichia, Thrasyboulos’ men were drawn up ‘not more than ten hoplites deep’ while their enemies stood 'no less than fifty shields in depth' (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11–12). The Spartans at Peiraieus and the Thebans at the Nemea were deployed 'extremely deep' (βαθεῖαν παντελῶς, Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34, 4.2.18); all we know is that in the latter case this meant more than sixteen ranks. There are no clues as to what Thucydides meant when he recorded a Syracusan force of 'not a few shields' guarding a narrow pass (7.79.1). The famous fifty-deep Theban phalanx at Leuktra was actually, according to Xenophon, 'not less than fifty shields', facing a Spartan formation 'not more than twelve men deep' (*Hell.* 6.4.12). These formations may all have been intended to meet a commander's call for a specific number of ranks, but in practice no clear standard was enforced, and our authors could only offer rough estimates.

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[80] The notion of a phalanx consisting of one rank of hoplites backed by seven ranks of helots is usually attributed to Hunt (1997, 132–137); it was in fact first suggested by Rüstow and Köchly (1852, 50).

[81] Cawkwell 1983, 390.

Sometimes the sources do report a straightforward command to form up in eight ranks; sometimes they show a formation unequivocally eight or sixteen deep.[82] But how standard can such deployments have been, if ancient authors insist on pointing out their depth? The decision to form up eight deep was clearly not made by default, or else a mere order to form up would have sufficed. Xenophon tells us that the remnants of the Ten Thousand, when ordered to fall into line, once formed up eight deep of their own accord (*An.* 7.1.22–23); but they are shown earlier to form up 'in fours' (ἐπὶ τεττάρων, *An.* 1.2.15) when given the same order, and on a later occasion they plainly needed the number of desired ranks spelled out to them (*Hell.* 3.2.16). Despite the relatively frequent appearance of phalanxes of eight ranks, there is not a single known instance of a battle in which *both* sides are said to have formed up eight deep.[83]

Picked elite hoplites such as the three hundred Spartan *hippeis* and the three hundred Theban Sacred Band could not be neatly divided into files of eight. Rubincam has shown that smaller detachments of hoplites in Thucydides are overwhelmingly either three hundred or one thousand strong; only the latter is divisible by eight, and the fact that almost all army figures are multiples of one hundred suggests that the figure of one thousand actually reflects a decimal focus.[84] It may be argued that Thucydides' numbers are the result of rounding and adding officers, but there is no reason why the dominant figures should not have been four hundred or twelve hundred to begin with. The frequency of forces three hundred strong in particular implies that formations of five, six, ten or twelve ranks may have been common. Some of the examples cited here involve formations ten or twelve deep; apparently six and twelve ranks were among the standard deployments for Spartan hoplites during the fourth century.[85]

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[82] Thuc. 4.94.1, 6.67.1–2; Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34, 3.2.16, 4.2.18, 6.2.21.

[83] Note Cawkwell's plausible suggestion (1983, 389–390) that the anti-Spartan coalition at First Mantineia was deployed in greater depth than the Spartans' eight ranks. Thucydides' silence leaves the matter open for debate.

[84] Rubincam 1991, 185, 194; see also Detienne 1968, 134; Lee 2004, 295.

Depth, then, appears to have been altogether flexible. While the number eight is most often mentioned in the extant sources, we have no reason to assume it applied to formations for which no depth is known. Any figure was conceivable, and many were tried. With this in mind, the crucial question is how the proper number of ranks for a particular engagement was determined. What principles of military thought were expressed by the depth of a phalanx?

No military treatise explains such principles to us, but the works of Xenophon contain interesting clues. When the Ten Thousand encountered the Kolchians, he himself offered them words of advice:

> … ἢν μὲν ἐπὶ πολλῶν τεταγμένοι προσάγωμεν, περιττεύσουσιν ἡμῶν οἱ πολέμιοι καὶ τοῖς περιττοῖς χρήσονται ὅ τι ἂν βούλωνται: ἐὰν δὲ ἐπ᾽ ὀλίγων τεταγμένοι ὦμεν, οὐδὲν ἂν εἴη θαυμαστὸν εἰ διακοπείη ἡμῶν ἡ φάλαγξ ὑπὸ ἁθρόων καὶ βελῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων πολλῶν ἐμπεσόντων: εἰ δέ πῃ τοῦτο ἔσται, τῇ ὅλῃ φάλαγγι κακὸν ἔσται.
>
> … if we advance formed up many ranks deep, the enemy will outflank us, using their outflanking wing as they like; on the other hand, if we are formed up a few ranks deep, we should not be surprised if our phalanx is cut through by a hail of missiles and men falling upon us; and if this happens anywhere, it will be bad for the whole phalanx.
>
> XEN. *An.* 4.8.11

Other passages show these scenarios in practice. When the allies who were to fight at the Nemea held council to decide on the depth of the line, the explicit purpose of their agreement was 'to prevent *poleis* from making their phalanxes too deep and giving the enemy a chance to surround them' (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.13). When the Boiotians made their contingent 'extremely deep' regardless, the line was critically shortened, and the Athenians on the left soon found themselves in exactly the predicament they had feared. Yet the failed Spartan attempt to take Kerkyra in 373 showed that commanders were also concerned not to make their line too thin. When the defenders sallied, one wing of the Spartan-led force bore the brunt of the assault; the men there felt their phalanx was 'weak' (ἀσθενὲς) and attempted to double its depth from eight to sixteen (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.21).

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[85] Xen. *Lak.Pol.* 11.4, assuming *enōmotia* of thirty-six; see Van Wees 2004, 185, 243–249; Sekunda 2014a, 51–52. Echeverría (2011, 58) realistically assumes a broad 'medium depth' of 10–16 shields.

These two conflicting priorities appear to have been central to the question of hoplite deployment. On the one hand, as Echeverría has recently argued, the Greeks were obsessed with protecting the flanks of the phalanx.[86] If there were no reserves or light units to guard the extreme ends of the line, Greek armies appear to have preferred to spread out as far as they could, even at the expense of their formation's depth. Marathon is the classic example:

> … τὸ στρατόπεδον ἐξισούμενον τῷ Μηδικῷ στρατοπέδῳ, τὸ μὲν αὐτοῦ μέσον ἐγίνετο ἐπὶ τάξιας ὀλίγας, καὶ ταύτῃ ἦν ἀσθενέστατον τὸ στρατόπεδον, τὸ δὲ κέρας ἑκάτερον ἔρρωτο πλήθεϊ.
>
> … the army being equal in length to the Median army, the middle was only a few ranks deep, and there the army was weakest, both of the wings being strong in numbers.
>
> HDT. 6.111.3[87]

On the other hand, a line of insufficient depth could be broken by force and attrition. This is exactly what happened to the Athenian centre at Marathon, and it may be for this reason that a hoplite line with a thinly spread centre is never seen again. There are only a few examples of formations of four ranks or less, and none are led into battle.[88] True, Xenophon has Kyros argue that a formation only two shields deep would be ideal, since only the first two ranks of hoplites could really fight (*Kyr.* 6.3.21–23)—but in light of the author's own tactics against the Kolchians, it is difficult to take this suggestion seriously.[89] At least some ranks of replacements were necessary for a phalanx to hold its ground.

What has puzzled scholars, though, is the sheer number of ranks the Greeks would sometimes set down. In its early days, the depth of a hoplite formation would have guaranteed its ability to resist cavalry charges, which may have been its original purpose, but this ability would have become less of a factor once battles began to revolve around the confrontation between two such formations of infantry. Yet hoplite lines remained deep, and even seem to have become deeper. The rationale behind this phenomenon has proven surprisingly hard to pin down. It is well known that Greek battles were not won by attrition alone; casualties on the losing side averaged some fourteen percent, and many of these fell in the chase after the line was broken.[90] Apparently no phalanx was ever systematically ground to a pulp by another phalanx. So what was the point of deploying sixteen, twenty-five or even fifty deep?

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[86] Echeverría (2011, 56–58, 68, 75) saw this as 'the core of Greek tactics in action'.

[87] Krentz 2010, 153–154.

[88] Xen. *An.* 1.2.15; Diod. 13.72.6; Polyainos, *Strat.* 2.1.24. The only exception is Isokrates' doubtful tale (6.99) of a one-rank Spartan phalanx at the battle of Dipaia.

[89] See Xen. *An.* 4.8.11, and indeed *Kyr.* 7.5.2; van Wees 2004, 190.

On this subject the debate is muddled by the elusive concept of the 'weight' of an infantry charge. Many modern authors have assumed that a deeper formation will strike harder, forcing its way through its enemies by sheer forward momentum—more men, more power. But as Wheeler has pointed out, 'this application of a simple principle of physics to the battlefield is more theoretical than real'.[91] Three quarters of a century earlier, Wolter already expressed his doubt 'that the strength of mass pressure grew proportionally with the depth of the deployment.'[92] Since the cutting edge of a hoplite charge is ultimately one running man and his spear, it is not clear how the number of men behind him should make any difference to the strength of the attack. A great controversy rages over the possibility that, once engaged, the whole phalanx physically forced the first rank forward, reducing hoplite battle to a colossal shoving match—an explanation for the occurrence of the 'pushing' (ὠθισμός) in Greek battle descriptions. Deep formations are used as evidence for a literal reading of the word; the extra ranks, it is argued, could serve no conceivable purpose other than giving a deeper phalanx the edge in the mass shove. But the passionate proponents and critics of this vision of phalanx combat remain unable to convince each other.[93] One thing is clear: the Classical Greeks did not justify deep formations by emphasising their ability to push. No Classical historical work or military treatise makes any mention of depth as a way to increase a formation's weight or momentum. The notion is found only in passages from later works, which often relate explicitly to the Macedonian pike phalanx (Polyb. 2.69.8–9, 18.30.4; Askl. 5.2; Arr. *Takt.* 12.2–3, 10).[94]

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[90] Krentz 1985a, 18–19; Luginbill 1994, 59; Dayton 2005, 81–102. For more detailed discussion of the pursuit, see Chapter 6 below.

[91] Wheeler 2004, 347–348.

[92] 'Man darf nicht glauben, daß die Stärke des Massendruckes proportional mit der Tiefe der Aufstellung wächst': Wolter 1931, 315–316.

[93] Lammert 1899, 12; Kromayer/Veith 1903, 70; Grundy 1911, 267–269; Fraser 1942; Cartledge 1977, 16; Cawkwell 1978, 151–153, Holladay 1982, 96–97; Anderson 1984; Krentz 1985b; Lazenby 1985, 37–38; Hanson 1989, 172–177; Lazenby 1991, 97–100; Luginbill 1994; Krentz 1994; Goldsworthy 1997; Sabin 2000, 4, 8; Van Wees 2000, 131–132; 2004, 188–191; Rawlings 2007, 95–97; Wheeler 2007c, 209–211; Matthew 2009; Schwartz 2009, 163–200; Krentz 2010, 53–58; Lendon 2010, 307–313; Bardunias 2011; Rusch 2011, 17; Crowley 2012, 53–62; Matthew 2012, 205–228; Bardunias/Ray 2016, 132–138.

Indeed, ancient accounts show that deep formations were not always able to push back thinner lines. If a battle between two phalanxes was about pushing force, and greater depth served to increase that force, it should follow that in prolonged close combat deeper formations were always able to shove their opponents back. Yet, at Syracuse, the Athenians withstood an enemy phalanx twice their own depth 'for a long time' and eventually broke it (Thuc. 6.70.1–2). During their retreat, they tried to fight a Syracusan formation 'many shields deep' blocking a pass, but were driven off—not because they were physically shoved down the hill by the Syracusans, but because of the storm of missiles thrown down from the heights above (7.79.1–2). Xenophon offers even more striking evidence that we should not regard a deep formation as a literal battering ram. At Mounichia, Thrasyboulos' democratic insurgents only had enough hoplites to form a ten-deep formation against the fifty-deep phalanx of the Thirty. In his pre-battle speech, however, Thrasyboulos tried to reassure those who feared that the front ranks would have to 'fight *on equal terms*' (ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου μάχεσθαι, Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.16), telling them that their uphill position and the missiles thrown by the men behind them would make all the difference. The suggestion that the fight would be on even terms should surely have seemed absurd, and Thrasyboulos' encouragements hollow, if the strength of a hoplite charge was directly linked to the depth of the phalanx. Xenophon also records that the Spartans at Leuktra were able to drag their wounded king away from the front lines, proving that their twelve-rank phalanx was initially able to hold its own, and even create a breathing space, despite the best efforts of a fifty-deep enemy formation (*Hell.* 6.4.13).[95] He also tells us that, when the Thebans attacked Sparta in 362, a group of just one hundred hoplites under Archidamos charged uphill against the entire Theban army and managed to drive it back (*Hell.* 7.5.12). In short, the number of ranks does not seem to have been much of a factor in the impact of a hoplite charge or the pushing power of a phalanx. Even if the mass shove was a feature of hoplite combat, it is not likely to have been the reason for the Greeks to deploy very deep formations. Their real purpose must be sought elsewhere.

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[94] One notable exception is Diodoros' emphasis on the 'weight' (βάρος) of the Theban formation at Leuktra (15.55.4). However, Diodoros offers the only account in which the Thebans *do not* explicitly deploy a deep formation. He merely describes a phalanx in echelon with its best men on the advanced wing. Furthermore, he does not single out its weight as the only decisive factor, also noting its tightness (πυκνότητα) and the valour of the picked vanguard.

[95] Wolter 1931, 315–316; Anderson 1970, 218.

It has been suggested that the rear ranks of a deep formation served as a tactical reserve, kept out of the fighting by the lines of men in front.[96] Yet this theory has been dismissed,[97] probably rightly—there is no known example of a phalanx being split up or refreshed from the rear while its front ranks were engaged. The men in the seemingly superfluous rear ranks faced the same way as those in front and braced themselves to take part in the same fight. On the other hand, while some form of irregular replacement from the rear must have occurred, we do not actually know of any system to relieve exhausted warriors. Those in the rear of a very deep phalanx probably never fought. Similarly, it would be wrong to argue that the option of deploying many shields deep was only available to armies that could secure the width of their line in other ways.[98] Battles like the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18), Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12) and even the fighting outside Kerkyra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.21–22) clearly show depth as an *alternative* to width, of which the benefits were thought by some to outweigh the risks. In some situations, where the terrain guarded the flanks or channelled the fighting, a deep formation could be the only way to involve all the hoplites in the clash; at Syracuse the defenders made their phalanx sixteen deep because an eight-rank formation would have left half the army out of the fight (Thuc. 6.67.1–2), while at Mounichia the Thirty deployed fifty deep to go up a road flanked by walls and rising terrain (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11).[99] However, in most cases the deep phalanx was not a result of the peculiarities of the battlefield; it was neither an infantry reserve nor a luxury available to the army with superior numbers. Like the deployment of the contingents in a battle line, it was deliberately chosen to suit a particular plan.

In all likelihood the reason behind very deep deployments was the same as the reason the ancients offered for the placement of their best and strongest troops: the reinforcement of the critical point of the line. Deep ranks were not meant to increase the force of the charge, but to make sure the line could not break, and the attack could not fail. Even a very local breakthrough could mean victory if it led to the disintegration of the enemy force. According to

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[96] Fraser 1942, 16; Cawkwell 1972, 261.

[97] Holladay 1982, 96 n. 13; Lazenby 1985, 156–157; Hanson 1988, 196–197; Luginbill 1994, 59.

[98] This is the view of Echeverría (2011, 57–58).

[99] Note Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.11, where Epameinondas is commended for trying to avoid a similar situation.

Xenophon, Epameinondas massed all his best men on one wing at Second Mantineia because he believed that 'if he could strike and cut through anywhere, he would destroy the entire opposing army' (*Hell.* 7.5.23).

This intention is not to be misunderstood. The point of concentration in depth was not to coldly sacrifice rank upon rank of hoplites until the goal was achieved. As noted repeatedly, it was not by inflicting casualties that battles were won, but by breaking the enemy's will to fight. In this sense the deep deployment, like the use of mobile missile troops, could be a shortcut to victory. Krentz has argued that a very deep formation would both boost the morale of the front-rank fighters and terrify the enemy; the latter would soon realise that they had no hope of breaking through the unrelenting ranks of the column. Goldsworthy has set out in detail how the rear ranks, safely distant from brutal close combat, by their mere presence would prevent those in front from running away.[100] Philip Sabin has further noted that a deeper formation would allow for a more rigorous selection of front-rank fighters, ensuring that the formation's cutting edge was as sharp as possible.[101] Xenophon stresses precisely these advantages of depth when he makes Kyros double his phalanx before the walls of Babylon:

> οἵ τε μένοντες εὐθὺς θαρραλεώτεροι ἐγίγνοντο ἐπὶ διπλασίων τὸ βάθος γιγνόμενοι, οἵ τ' ἀπιόντες ὡσαύτως θαρραλεώτεροι: εὐθὺς γὰρ οἱ μένοντες ἀντ' αὐτῶν πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους ἐγίγνοντο. (…) ἡ δ' οὕτως ἔχουσα τάξις καὶ πρὸς τὸ μάχεσθαι ἐδόκει εὖ παρεσκευάσθαι καὶ πρὸς τὸ μὴ φεύγειν.
>
> … those who held their places immediately became braver, because the depth was doubled; and those who had fallen back also became braver, because those who held their places now faced the enemy instead of them. (…) And this deployment seemed well-adapted both to fight and to keep the men from fleeing.
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> XEN. *Kyr.* 7.5.4–5

Crucially, there is not a hint of formation 'weight' or the creation of a reserve here. The focus is entirely on the morale of the troops.[102] The main point of

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[100] Krentz 1985b, 60; 1994, 46; Goldsworthy 1997, 12–14, 23; Van Wees 2004, 191. The effect outlined by Goldsworthy was an organisational principle of the Macedonian phalanx (Askl. 5.2).

[101] Sabin 2000, 11.

[102] Both Van Wees (2000c, 101) and Millender (2016, 166–167) asserted that the sole purpose of the rear ranks was to offer moral support.

TABLE 5 *Deep formations*

| Date | Place | Contingent | Depth | Outcome | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 424 | Delion | Thebans | 25 | Enemy phalanx broken | Thuc. 4.93.4–96.6 |
| 415 | Syracuse | Syracusans | 16 | Defeat | Thuc. 6.67.2–70.1 |
| 413 | Cliff of Akraion | Syracusans | 'Not a few shields' | Enemy repulsed | Thuc. 7.79.1–2 |
| 403 | Mounichia | Thirty | 50 | Defeat in uphill battle | Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.11–19 |
| 403 | Peiraieus | Spartans | 'Extremely deep' | Enemy phalanx broken | Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.34 |
| 394 | Nemea | Allies | 16 | Initial success spoiled by enemy flank attack | Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18–23 |
| | | Thebans | 'Extremely deep' | | |
| 371 | Leuktra | Thebans | 50 | Enemy phalanx broken | Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.12–14 |
| 362 | Mantineia | Boiotians | Deep, like ram or trireme | Enemy phalanx broken | Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.22–25 |
| 334 | Halikarnassos | Greeks in Persian service | 'Deep' | Initial success spoiled by enemy reinforcements | Diod. 17.26.3–27.3 |

deploying many ranks deep was that it made a hoplite formation significantly harder to break.

This fact made a deep phalanx a uniquely powerful weapon against even the most skilled enemy force. Attrition achieved nothing if it could not dishearten those who took the place of the fallen; instinctive self-preservation on the side of the thinner line would soon take over from cruel mathematics. With no hope of winning—as in the battles of hoplites against *psiloi*—even Spartans would rather save themselves than go on to the death. The importance of morale explains why deep formations were usually successful. They would only break in unusually adverse circumstances: at Mounichia, the Thirty were defeated in an uphill battle covered by Thrasyboulos' well-placed *psiloi* (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.15–16, 19); at Syracuse, the defending phalanx was inexperienced, confused and frightened by thunder (Thuc. 6.69.1, 70.1); at the Nemea, the Boiotians were struck when they thought the fight was already over (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22–23). During the siege of Halikarnassos in 334, the men under Ephialtes sallied from the city in deep formation and chewed their way through three lines of picked Macedonians led by Alexander himself, 'thinking because of their depth that they would be invincible', until a final reserve pushed them back (Diod. 17.26.3–27.3). In all other known cases, the deeper phalanx triumphed (Table 5). Whatever happened elsewhere along the line, it would not break; it would not panic or be weakened by attrition; it would, if nothing else interfered, eventually shatter its target.

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From the late Archaic period onwards, deployment for battle answered to a number of overlapping priorities: minimising the influence of enemy cavalry and *psiloi*, preserving the integrity of the phalanx, maintaining the ability to seize opportunities, and concentrating force at the decisive point. If the Greeks' attempts to negotiate these priorities at times led to the unobstructed advance of rival phalanxes with their best troops on the right, it is more a testimony to the commanders' careful choice of conditions than it is proof of tactical conventions. Hoplites were drawn up according to a tactical plan—usually the intention to break the enemy at a particular point—and mobile forces served both to exploit what weaknesses they could find and to prevent the interference of enemy light troops with the plan. The phalanx' triumph usually decided the battle, in part because the general made his personal contribution there, and in part because no army could fight with its chest and cuirass smashed in. Nevertheless, without hands and feet, a Greek hoplite force would have its options critically reduced to rolling forward and slugging it out with its opposing number, hoping for the best.

CHAPTER 5

# 'Utterly Outmatched in Skill': Battle Tactics

## Controlling Battle

If there is any consistent theme in the discussions of the last two chapters, it is that the Greeks went to battle with a specific plan, tailored to the circumstances of battle. They sought to manipulate the time and place of the fight to secure the greatest possible advantage; they deployed their armies to nullify the enemy's strengths and maximise their own; they arranged their troops in a way that suited the particular manoeuvre by which they intended to win. But what happened after this? Greek battle tactics—in this context, the system of known and practiced manoeuvres and responses to circumstance in open engagements—have often been characterised as deliberately primitive, if not outright non-existent. The battle of the Nemea, fought in 394, has been described as the first battle that 'can with any certainty be said to have been won by tactics'.[1] Many have argued that the role of Classical Greek commanders ended once their troops had been drawn up; there were no further orders to give or reserves to command, and the general's task consisted of nothing more than leading his men headlong into the fray.[2] Is this all there is to say about the execution of their careful plans? Did Greek generals' shrewd attempts to influence battle stop at the sound of the paean?

This question is not merely rhetorical. The conditions of battle and the composition of Greek armies combined to make tactical control in the heat of battle all but impossible. These challenges had to be overcome if rapid response to circumstance was to be the key to victory. An overview of the restrictive realities faced by Greek commanders appears at first sight to suggest that a pessimistic estimate of their capacity for sophisticated tactics may not be far off the mark.

First of all, Greek generals did not have many means at their disposal to control an engaged force. In an age of limited technology, there were only a few ways to transmit orders in battle, and the Greeks do not appear to have

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[1] Lazenby 1993, 251.

[2] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 71–72; Tarn 1930, 30; Adcock 1957, 6–7; Cawkwell 1972, 261; Cartledge 1977, 15–16; Connor 1988, 13; Hanson 1989, 107–108; Snodgrass 1999, 62; Lendon 2005, 42; Mann 2013, 8. Some recent scholarship does acknowledge a modest degree of complexity in Greek tactics: see Wheeler 1991, 124; Rawlings 2007, 90; Matthew 2012, 238–239; Hanson 2013, 267.

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used even these to full effect. The only audiovisual aid they employed was a type of trumpet called the *salpinx*, and Krentz has noted that they employed this instrument for just two battle signals: the charge and the retreat. All else was conveyed by word of mouth.[3] Veterans like Xenophon knew that such vocal commands could only be passed down effectively if armies were divided into a hierarchy of sub-units led by their own officers,[4] but Greek militia armies completely lacked this kind of organisation; we have no evidence of officers below the level of the *lochos*, a unit that was usually several hundred strong.[5] The fact that Xenophon still had to urge the Athenian cavalry to adopt a proper chain of command as late as the 360s (*Hipparch*. 2.6) shows that citizen forces tended to remain very loosely organised throughout the Classical period. As a result, the transmission of orders must have been a very haphazard affair. Most Greeks seem to have relied mainly on shouting at each other, or passing orders from man to man down the ranks like the watchword at Kounaxa.[6]

Secondly, the armies gathered for major battles were often many thousands strong, and the phalanx alone could stretch across the battlefield for hundreds of metres. Such masses of men were very hard to manage and move with limited means of communication, and their sheer size restricted these means even further. Even on the most level plain, obstacles such as houses, trees and field walls meant that there was probably no single place from which the entire army could be seen; while it was possible for all to hear the *salpinx*, shouted orders would not carry very far. Generals therefore had to rely on a long chain of small links to pass down their commands. The stress of combat would have made this a formidable challenge. Once battle was joined, whatever order may have existed seems to have devolved into chaos; with 'no one knowing much of anything that does not go on right around him' (Thuc. 7.44.1), the air filled with 'that strange noise made by anger and battle together' (Xen. *Ag.* 2.12), 'those who are face to face with their enemies can hardly see even what they must' (Eur. *Suppliants* 855–856).[7] In these frantic circumstances, it seems unlikely that vocal commands would be heard or heeded beyond the general's immediate vicinity.[8] Even if they were, we can hardly expect that they would be conveyed correctly from one man to another—especially if the enemy was shouting as well.[9] As a result, any attempted movement of the army was likely to lead to chaos. Xenophon is surely speaking from experience when he declares that 'the more soldiers there are, the more mistakes they will make' (φιλοῦσι δέ πως στρατιῶται, ὅσῳ ἂν πλείους ὦσι, τοσούτῳ πλείω ἁμαρτάνειν, *Hipparch.* 7.9).

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[3] Krentz 1991, 115–116, 118; see also Anderson 1965, 1–2; Cartledge 1987, 206. Aineias the Tactician (4.1, 7.2–4, 10.25–26, 16.16) recommends the use of signal fires, but only for the defence of a city's territory, since they had to be set up in high places to be useful.

[4] Xen. *Hipparch*. 2.6; *Lak.Pol*. 11.5–6. The process is seen in action at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.66.3–4, 5.73.2).

[5] Anderson 1965, 3; Lazenby 1989, 63; Lee 2004, 289–290, 302; Van Wees 2004, 99–100; Lendon 2005, 74–75; Hunt 2007, 129–130; Toalster 2011, 73–74. Authors such as Anderson (1970, 98–100) and Matthew (2012, 169–170, 197) have assumed that officer hierarchies existed in all hoplite armies, but there is no evidence for this; the only exceptions are the Spartans, discussed below, and certain elements of the Ten Thousand (Xen. *An*. 3.4.21, 4.3.26), which were clearly organised after the Spartan model (Lazenby 1991, 89 n. 3).

[6] Thuc. 7.44.4; Xen. *An*. 1.8.16; *Kyr*. 3.3.61–62. Xen. *Hell*. 4.2.19 shows this in practice. The unreliable nature of this method in the absence of a clear officer hierarchy is stressed by Onasander (*Strat*. 25.1–2).

Thirdly, again, Greek armies consisted of untrained men. It is not certain how much military experience these levies would have had; Athens may have regularly sent significant forces abroad for prolonged periods, but other states had fewer entanglements, and the average Greek would not have gone to war often. General levies were rare, their campaigns short, and large-scale battles occurred only a few times per generation.[10] Most citizen hoplites would have had little if any experience with the conditions of such engagements. The result of this lack of experience and training was that commanders of hoplite militias had few reliable means to control their men. Later tactical authors, noting how hard it is to hear words of command over the noise of battle, advise extensive use of the *salpinx*, which would require instinctive familiarity with a range of signals (Askl. 12.10; Aelian 34). Aelian further stresses the importance of silence in the ranks to make sure commands are heard (52). Classical Greeks were not so disciplined. The silent advance of the Persian infantry at Kounaxa was a marvel to Xenophon (*An.* 1.8.11); most Greeks went into battle running and yelling. No commander would have had much faith in the ability of these warriors to carry out his orders swiftly and effectively. As Whatley cynically put it, 'I doubt whether Napoleon himself could have been clever with a fifth-century Greek army unless he were given an opportunity to train it.'[11] We have little reason to be any more optimistic about the armies of the century that followed.

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[7] Hanson 1989, 152–154.

[8] Sidebottom 2004, 84. Xenophon notes that even the commander of a Spartan *enomotia* of thirty-six men could not reach his whole unit with his voice (*Lak.Pol.* 13.9).

[9] Hanson 1989, 143. This became especially problematic during the night attack on Epipolai, with Dorian Greek spoken on both sides (Thuc. 7.44.6). This is the only time we hear of such confusion; however, considering the large coalition armies assembled by the Greeks, it must have been a common occurrence.

[10] Connor 1988, 6–7; Rawlings 2007, 66–69, 78; 2014, 5–6, 14; Echeverría 2011, 47–48. On the overemphasis of our sources on warfare, and its relatively limited role in actual Greek society, see Hornblower 2007.

Fourthly, the generals themselves tended to fight in the front rank of the phalanx. This tendency has often been interpreted as a consequence of the lack of tactics in Greek battles—if there was nothing else for the general to do, he might as well use his spear—but it may be more accurate to regard it as its *cause*.[12] I have noted earlier how emphatically Xenophon stresses the need for a general to lead by example if he wishes to win the respect of his men; harsh disciplinary measures were not a popular concept, but conspicuous displays of courage inspired similar behaviour.[13] Commanders therefore usually chose to be in the thick of it, rather than managing the battle from a good vantage point well out of harm's way. As a result, the generals themselves would have been among those who knew only what was right in front of them. It would have been as difficult for them to issue orders as it would have been for their men to receive them. During the fight, even the men right next to them were unable to respond to events:

> ὁ δὲ Μνάσιππος τοῖς μὲν πιεζομένοις οὐκ ἐδύνατο βοηθεῖν διὰ τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ καταντικρὺ προσκειμένους, ἀεὶ δ᾽ ἐλείπετο σὺν ἐλάττοσι. τέλος δὲ οἱ πολέμιοι ἀθρόοι γενόμενοι πάντες ἐπετίθεντο τοῖς περὶ τὸν Μνάσιππον, ἤδη μάλα ὀλίγοις οὖσι.
>
> Mnasippos could not help those who were hard pressed, because he was under attack by those directly in front; he was left with an ever smaller number of men. Finally the enemy all massed themselves together and attacked those around Mnasippos, who by now were very few.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 6.2.22

The participation of generals in combat also frequently led to them being incapacitated or killed—effectively, to return to Iphikrates' analogy, decapitating the army.[14] It is not surprising to find Plutarch using the fate of a fourth-century

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[11] Whatley 1964, 125.

[12] Sidebottom 2004, 106–107.

[13] Xen. *Ag.* 6.1; *An.* 2.6.7, 2.6.19, 3.4.47–49; *Hipparch.* 6; *Mem.* 3.3.9. Numerous scholars have emphasised this Greek preference for the 'soldier's general' command style: see Lengauer 1979, 148, 151–152; Hanson 1989, 107–116; Wheeler 1991, 144–145; 2007, 215; Hutchinson 2000, 54–55, 61; Christ 2006, 99.

[14] For instance, Kallimachos at Marathon (Hdt. 6.114.1), Kallias at Potidaia (Thuc. 1.63.3), and

Greek to teach his readers that a general is too important to put his own life at risk (*Pel.* 2.4–5). Compelled to display their valour in the front rank, they could not be battlefield managers even if they wanted to be.

In all these respects, the Spartans had an edge over other Greeks. While we should not overstate the level of Spartan training, in a context of complete military amateurism their modest improvements on common practice could make a significant difference. The Spartans' unique officer hierarchy allowed for the smooth transmission of orders to men who had been drilled to obey them. The Spartans notably did not charge screaming into battle, but marched at an even pace to the sound of flutes; this custom allowed them to retain their formation and to mark any commands that came down (Thuc. 5.70).[15] Furthermore, Wheeler has pointed to various hints in the sources that Spartan kings may have been stationed away from the front rank in battle.[16] It would have been impossible for the regent Pausanias to perform the sacrifice at Plataia (Hdt. 9.61.3), or for Agesilaos to be garlanded by his mercenaries at Koroneia (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17), if these men had been at the cutting edge of their respective armies; Xenophon's accounts of Leuktra (*Hell.* 6.4.13) and Kromnos (*Hell.* 7.4.23) show royal bodyguards fighting ahead of the kings they served. Of course, the fates of Brasidas at Amphipolis and of Mnasippos at Kerkyra show that less highborn Spartan commanders still fought and died in the front rank—the privilege of a protective screen of Spartans was probably reserved only for royalty. Yet this practice would have dramatically increased the kings' ability to manage their battles.

However, in at least one way the armies led by Spartan kings were just as handicapped as the forces fielded by others. We have seen that the Greeks would only consider pitched battle as an option if they could match their opponent's numbers; despite the unwieldiness of large forces, it was a basic principle of Greek military thought that a big army was stronger than a small one.[17] The major conflicts of the Classical period saw large alliances take the field

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most famously Epameinondas at Second Mantineia (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.25; Diod. 15.86.4–87.6); see Lazenby 1991, 98. Debidour (2002, 44) claims to have found as many as 33 examples, but does not provide a list.

[15] Lee 2006, 484.

[16] Wheeler 1991, 148–150; however, Pritchett (1994b, 138–141) has disputed this.

[17] Note here, for instance, the claim Thucydides puts in the mouth of Knemos and Brasidas, that 'the more numerous and better prepared will have victory' (2.87.6); Xenophon's claim that Thessaly had enough peltasts to conquer the world (*Hell.* 6.1.19); and Plato's point that larger city-states usually conquer smaller ones regardless of the relative quality of their institutions (*Laws* 638a–b).

against each other, and few city-states could rely entirely on their own militia to counter such threats. As a result, the armies that fought major engagements tended to be collections of unevenly sized detachments levied for the occasion by various communities, each led by its own commander, at times reluctantly placed under the leadership of a single general or council of generals.

Unsurprisingly—and at least in part because of the noted reluctance of Classical Greeks to adopt a more militarist attitude—these contingents could rarely be merged into a single cohesive force. Kromayer and Veith rightly stressed their apparently almost autonomous behaviour in battle.[18] They were not always keen to follow orders even if orders reached them. Pausanias describes succinctly how this affected both sides at Leuktra:

> τῷ δὲ Ἐπαμινώνδᾳ καὶ ἐς ἄλλους Βοιωτῶν ὕποπτα ἦν, ἐς δὲ τοὺς Θεσπιεῖς καὶ περισσότερον: δείσας οὖν μὴ σφᾶς παρὰ τὸ ἔργον προδῶσιν, ἀποχώρησιν παρεῖχεν ἀπὸ στρατοπέδου τοῖς ἐθέλουσιν οἴκαδε: καὶ οἱ Θεσπιεῖς τε ἀπαλλάσσονται πανδημεὶ καὶ εἴ τισιν ἄλλοις Βοιωτῶν ὑπῆν δύσνοια ἐς τοὺς Θηβαίους. ὡς δὲ ἐς χεῖρας συνῄεσαν, ἐνταῦθα οἱ σύμμαχοι τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ἅτε αὐτοῖς καὶ τὸν πρὸ τοῦ χρόνον οὐκ ἀρεσκόμενοι τὸ ἔχθος μάλιστα ἐπεδείκνυντο, οὔτε κατὰ χώραν μένειν ἐθέλοντες, ἐνδιδόντες δὲ ὅπῃ σφίσιν οἱ πολέμιοι προσφέροιντο.
>
> Epameinondas had his suspicions of some of the Boiotians, the Thespians above all. Fearing that they would desert during the battle, he allowed anyone who wanted to leave the camp and go home; and the Thespians left with their entire levy, as did any other Boiotians who felt disaffected with the Thebans. When the fighting began, the allies of the Lakedaimonians, who had never been their friends, now showed their hate clearly, by their unwillingness to stand their ground, and by giving way wherever the enemy attacked them.
>
> PAUS. 9.13.8–9[19]

The threat of mass desertion or betrayal was very real. The campaign of Kleomenes against Athens in 507 fell apart when the Corinthians abandoned the army (Hdt. 5.75.1–76.1); the Athenians may have lost the battle of Tanagra because their Thessalian allies turned coat in the course of the clash (Thuc.

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[18] Kromayer/Veith 1928, 83–84, 86; see more recently Pritchett 1974, 190, 207; Hanson 1989, 143; Rawlings 2007, 84.

[19] See also Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.9 and 15; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.3.3. For the general lack of enthusiasm of Boiotian troops fighting in Theban wars, see Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.2.

1.107.7),[20] and the Herakleians suffered defeat against the Oitaians in 409 when their Achaian allies betrayed them (Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.18). However, plain disobedience was a more common problem. We have already seen how the Boiotians at the Nemea disregarded all agreements made between the leaders of the coalition army, which was the direct cause of its defeat. At Plataia, the Greeks who held the centre of the line chose to interpret the order to redeploy as a license to withdraw to the safety of the nearby town, leaving their allies on the flanks to face the Persians alone (Hdt. 9.52). During the battle proper, the Tegeans forced the Spartan commander's hand by charging without orders (Hdt. 9.62.1).[21] At Kounaxa, Klearchos showed again that subordinate Greek commanders did not always care to do as they were told, when he refused to follow his employer's instruction to march across the battlefield to his aid (Xen. *An.* 1.8.12–13).[22] Plutarch blamed the quick collapse of the Greek alliance in the Lamian War entirely on the disobedience of the troops (*Phok.* 26.1). Isokrates may not have exaggerated too much when he made Archidamos boast that the Spartans need not fear their enemies uniting against them; the resulting coalition force, after all, would consist of 'undisciplined and mixed-up men, serving under many leaders' (6.80)—a confused rabble, inviting its own defeat.

We might expect better behaviour when city-states fought on their own, but it seems that in practice even the men of a single levy would not always act as one. According to Thucydides, the Syracusans chalked up their initial defeat against Athens largely to their hoplites' disorganisation and insubordination; Nikias, meanwhile, called his Athenian troops 'by nature difficult to command' (Thuc. 6.72.4, 7.14.2). Half a century later we find Xenophon complaining that neither the hoplites nor the cavalry of Athens could be trusted to follow orders (*Mem.* 3.5.19). The problem here was not disloyalty or a lack of enthusiasm, as it was in large coalition armies, but rather the low level of military discipline to which Greek citizens were willing to submit. It appears such disobedience plagued even the Spartans; on at least two occasions the officers they put in place to facilitate the transmission of orders turned out at the critical moment to have a will of their own. At Plataia, the officer Amompharetos famously refused to withdraw his unit to its assigned new position, putting the safety of the entire army at risk (Hdt. 9.53.2–56.1). The disobedience of two *lochagoi* at First Mantineia again brought the Spartan army to the brink of disaster (Thuc. 5.72.1). Their behaviour was not tolerated, and the pair was exiled from Sparta—but the episode clearly shows that not even a Spartan upbringing could turn these men into blindly obedient automatons. The fact that Spartan tactics both in the overture to First Mantineia and at the Nemea were influenced by unnamed Spartans shouting advice from the ranks[23] suggests an approach to military matters that may fall far short of modern expectations.[24]

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[20] In Diodoros' version (11.80.2–6) the betrayal was not a decisive factor.

[21] Nyland (1992, 81–82) has noted how much Herodotos emphasises 'the enormity of the allies' disobedience'.

[22] In the circumstances this was probably wise; see for example Wylie 1992b, 124–126.

Bearing in mind the patchwork nature of Greek armies and the apparent attitude of Greek levies to military authority, we clearly cannot posit a perfect tactical system in which a command and its execution were the same. Needless to say, this would have made it even harder for Greek commanders to predict or influence the course of a battle. Indeed, they are likely to have striven to minimise the complexity of their plans to make sure they were asking as little as possible of their less reliable men.

There is an all-important distinction, then, between orders given before engaging the enemy and orders given in the course of the fight. It was relatively easy to orchestrate the initial deployment of units in accordance with a particular plan; rearranging this deployment after the plan had been set in motion was another thing altogether. This distinction explains why so much of Greek tactical thought seems to consist of deployment only. Aware of their limited capacity for effective response to circumstance, Greek commanders made every effort to rely on it as little as they possibly could. Units that were meant to play a special role in battle were given their instructions in advance:

> τῷ δὲ Ἱπποκράτει (…) καταλιπὼν ὡς τριακοσίους ἱππέας περὶ τὸ Δήλιον, ὅπως φύλακές τε ἅμα εἶεν, εἴ τις ἐπίοι αὐτῷ, καὶ τοῖς Βοιωτοῖς καιρὸν φυλάξαντες ἐπιγένοιντο ἐν τῇ μάχῃ.
>
> Hippokrates (…) left about three hundred horse behind at Delion, both to guard the place in case of attack, and to watch for a chance to strike the Boiotians during the battle.
>
> THUC. 4.93.2[25]

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[23] Thuc. 5.65.2; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22. Kelly (1981, 34–35) noted, however, that these events involved old men and senior officers—men who were higher up in the Spartan social hierarchy.

[24] See generally Shipley 1993, 18–19, and on Sparta specifically Tritle 2007b, 219. Lendon (2005, 75–77) has argued that obedience to one's commander was just one of a set of competitively displayed virtues at Sparta, which could at times be overruled by the desire to display a different one (such as, in Amompharetos' case, obedience to the laws by refusing to retreat).

[25] See also, for example, Thuc. 4.32.3–4, 5.71.3; *Hell. Oxy.* 11.4; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23–24.

Even if a general's plan hinged on the well-timed charge of a particular contingent, he would make no attempt to call out to that contingent when the right moment had come. Only at Potidaia do we hear of a signal being raised—on top of the nearby city wall, not with the general in the field (Thuc. 1.63.2).[26] More commonly the men would be told before battle what was expected of them:

> … σὺ δέ, Κλεαρίδα, ὕστερον, ὅταν ἐμὲ ὁρᾷς ἤδη προσκείμενον καὶ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς φοβοῦντα αὐτούς, τοὺς μετὰ σεαυτοῦ τούς τ' Ἀμφιπολίτας καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ξυμμάχους ἄγων αἰφνιδίως τὰς πύλας ἀνοίξας ἐπεκθεῖν καὶ ἐπείγεσθαι ὡς τάχιστα ξυμμεῖξαι.
>
> … and you, Klearidas, afterwards, when you see me already engaged and likely terrifying them, take with you the Amphipolitans and the other allies, and suddenly open the gates and rush out at them, and hurry into the fray as quickly as you can.
>
> THUC. 5.9.7[27]

Directives of this kind relied in the final instance on a subordinate commander's own battlefield awareness and judgment. Reserves and supporting forces fought at their own discretion.[28] Decisive manoeuvres were not left to depend on the deeply problematic means of battlefield communication and control outlined here. Instead, as much as possible was decided and arranged before a single blow was struck; generals took their place among the rank and file in the knowledge that they had already done what could be done.

Yet they risked everything by doing so. If part of the army abandoned the plan, as at Plataia and the Nemea, those who did follow orders were left in the lurch. If one side anticipated the other's deployment, as at Olpai and Leuktra, the battle was as good as lost. Worst of all, if an army came under surprise attack and did not have time to prepare, it was utterly helpless unless some semblance of order could be restored.

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[26] The only example of a tactical signal raised by a commander in battle occurs in Diodoros' account of the battle of Sardis (Diod. 14.80.3)—but Xenophon does not mention this, and DeVoto's detailed reconstruction has the commander of the ambushing force acting on his own initiative (1988, 49–50). Wylie (1992a) rejects the ploy altogether. Signals did of course feature more frequently in naval warfare. Pritchett (1994b, 127–129) offers a list of attestations.

[27] See also Thuc. 3.107.3, 5.58.4; Xen. *An.* 6.5.11; Diod. 13.109.5.

[28] Thuc. 4.43.4, 5.73.1, 6.67.1; *Hell. Oxy.* 11.5; Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10, 5.2.41; Paus. 3.5.4; Wheeler 2007c, 219.

Therefore, despite the difficulties, the Greeks did not always simply resign themselves to the notion that they could do nothing to change the outcome of a battle once it had begun. There are several known instances of commanders giving new orders as their circumstances changed. At Plataia, where the vast Greek army probably stretched across the hills for several kilometres, messengers on horseback rode back and forth between different contingents in the overture to the final confrontation (Hdt. 9.54.2–56.1); their presence probably explains how the Spartan commander was able to send a final plea for aid to his Athenian allies while already under attack by Persian horsemen (Hdt. 9.60.1). At Delion, the Theban general Pagondas—his own wing heavily engaged—managed to order part of his cavalry to ride around a hill and fall upon the Athenian rear as they rolled up the other end of his line (Thuc. 4.96.5). At First Mantineia, when his officers refused to fill the gap he had created, king Agis ordered his left to turn back and restore the line; the enemy reached them before they could do so, but Agis was later able to wheel his own wing and march across the battlefield to the rescue (Thuc. 5.72.1–73.3). At the Nemea the Spartans had more control: when the enemy had already started to advance, they calmly led their entire line off to the right to encircle them (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19–20)—a tactic Plutarch suggests they tried to repeat at Leuktra (*Pel.* 23.1–2). At Kynoskephalai in 364, the Theban Pelopidas appears to have successfully called back his cavalry from their victorious pursuit, sending them crashing into the rear of the enemy phalanx (Plut. *Pel.* 32.3–7). At Potidaia (Thuc. 1.63.1) and Koroneia (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18), the losing side was able to pull the remains of their phalanx into a tight formation, while the Spartans at Tegyra managed the opposite, thinning out their ranks (Plut. *Pel.* 17.3–4). Apparently, Greek generals *could* sometimes shape battles with commands given on the spot.

The essential question is what made the difference. What allowed some commanders to control their units in battle, while others could no longer alter their plans? A closer look at the examples cited above is instructive. It is not surprising that many of them involve Spartans. Indeed, if we consider the full list of cases of orders issued after the start of a battle (Table 6), we find that the great majority features Spartans or mercenaries led and trained by Spartans. The list testifies to the advantage gained from their efforts to organise their armies and safeguard their kings in battle. Moreover, the Spartans were the only ones ever to issue revised orders that required the participation of allied hoplites further down the line. No one else seems to have even attempted manoeuvres at such a scale. While Spartan commands sometimes affected 'the whole army' (παντὶ τῷ στρατεύματι, Thuc. 5.73.2) or simply 'everyone' (ἅπαντας, Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19), the commands of others typically applied to very spe-

TABLE 6 *Revised orders given during battle*

| Date | Place | Army | Orders | Troops involved | Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 479 | Plataia | Greeks | Athenians to come to Spartans' aid | Whole Athenian contingent or its archers | Hdt. 9.60.1 |
| 432 | Potidaia | Potidaians | Victorious wing to form tight formation for breakthrough to city | 'Corinthians and picked troops around [Aristeus]' | Thuc. 1.62.6–63.1 |
| 424 | Delion | Boiotians | Cavalry to attack Athenian right flank | 'Two units of horsemen' | Thuc. 4.96.5 |
| 418 | Mantineia | Spartans | Left wing to restore line<br>Right wing to wheel left | Skiritai<br>'The whole army' | Thuc. 5.72.1<br>Thuc. 5.73.2 |
| 414 | Syracuse | Athenians | Left wing to support crumbling right | 'A few archers and the Argives' | Thuc. 6.101.6 |
| 401 | Kounaxa | Ten Thousand | Countermarch to face threat from rear | 'The Greeks' | Xen. *An.* 1.10.6 |
| 400 | Bithynia | Ten Thousand | Left wing to reform and resume the charge | Peltasts and hoplites of the left wing | Xen. *An.* 6.5.29–30 |
| 394 | Nemea | Spartans | Whole line to march right in column | 'Everyone' | Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19 |
| | | | Right wing to wheel inward | 'The outflanking wing' | Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.20 |
| 394 | Koroneia | Boiotians | Victorious wing to form tight formation for breakthrough to camp | 'The Thebans' | Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18 |
| | | Spartans | Countermarch to face Thebans (implied) | Agesilaos' contingent | Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.19 |
| 381 | Olynthos | Spartans | Army to mount cascading charge against Olynthian cavalry | Hoplites, peltasts and horsemen | Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.4–5 |
| 375 | Tegyra | Spartans | Phalanx to open gaps for Thebans to pass through | 'The whole army' | Plut. *Pel.* 17.4 |
| 373 | Kerkyra | Spartans | Phalanx to double its depth | 'Those at the extreme end of the line' | Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.20–21 |
| 371 | Leuktra | Spartans | Phalanx to extend right and wheel inward | 'The right wing' | Plut. *Pel.* 23.2 |
| 364 | Kynoskephalai | Thebans | Cavalry to attack Alexander of Pherai's phalanx in rear | 'The horsemen' | Plut. *Pel.* 32.3 |

cific groups; in battle before the walls of Syracuse, Lamachos went to the rescue of the endangered right wing 'with a few of the archers and the Argives' (μετὰ τοξοτῶν τε οὐ πολλῶν καὶ τοὺς Ἀργείους, Thuc. 6.101.6). Non-Spartan cases of orders given in the course of a battle tended to concern only the contingent surrounding a general, or a separately grouped unit such as the cavalry. In other words, the only ones who could match the Spartan level of tactical control were specially selected troops or units that could be commanded directly.

Taken together, Spartan and non-Spartan examples of revised battle plans reveal a clear pattern. The forces that could be expected to follow orders in the heat of battle had to meet one or more of a few criteria: they had to be trained, well-organised, or under the general's immediate control.[29] In Spartan-led armies, most men appear to have met some or all of these criteria. In other armies, only a few could be relied upon to respond effectively to circumstance.

By contrast, the large, untrained and unwieldy bodies of hoplite militia that made up the bulk of Greek coalition armies were never asked to change their initial role. They were simply lined up in their appropriate order and launched at whatever they found in front of them. When the manoeuvre attempted by the Spartans at First Mantineia went awry and their left wing was destroyed, Thucydides considered them 'utterly outmatched in skill' (5.72.2)[30]—outmatched, apparently, by an enemy who did nothing more sophisticated than charging straight at them and pouring into the gap in their line. From the Athenian author's perspective, the Spartan king's efforts to rearrange his phalanx seemed not merely ill-advised, but impossible; the ensuing events proved that once the enemy had begun their advance, the time for manoeuvre was over. Agis should have realised it was too late for Spartan ingenuity to come into play. The more skilled force was the one that stuck with the plan.

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[29] Tellingly, Xenophon regarded it as a particular advantage of deepening the phalanx that the resulting shortening of the line drew the cavalry and light troops on the flanks closer to the general (*Kyr.* 7.5.5).

[30] The Greek of this passage ('ἀλλὰ μάλιστα δὴ κατὰ πάντα τῇ ἐμπειρίᾳ Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἐλασσωθέντες τότε τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ ἔδειξαν οὐχ ἧσσον περιγενόμενοι') is not entirely clear. Hornblower (2008, 189), leaning on Jowett here, translates τῇ ἐμπειρίᾳ ἐλασσωθέντες 'deficient in tactical skill', suggesting the Spartans are being judged relative to their own past deeds. Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (1970, 120–121) have pointed out that Thucydides' focus is on the way in which the Spartans, after their humiliation on Sphakteria, restored their reputation for bravery. However, Thucydides gives us no clear point against which to measure Spartan skill. It seems more sensible to me to assume they are being compared in both aspects to their Argive enemies, who indeed show themselves τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ ἧσσον when Agis advances upon them. The Loeb translation reads 'inferior in point of tactical skill'—not 'lacking' in a general sense, but 'inferior', which ought to refer to the Argives. I have tried to bring this out in my translation.

Indeed, it seems to have been increasingly felt that even this single, straightforward effort was too much to ask of the hoplite militia. At Haliartos the Spartans already regarded their allies as a liability (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.23). At the Nemea (4.2.20) and Leuktra (6.4.14) they consequently decided to ignore their allied contingents' fates entirely, focusing all their efforts on winning the battle by themselves on their own flank.[31] The Thebans at Second Mantineia showed just how little faith they had in their allies when they deployed them in echelon to prevent their inevitable rout from discouraging the rest of the army (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.23).[32] Meanwhile, Athenian writings suggest that even the reliability of a city's own militia was not always taken for granted. We have seen how Xenophon was harshly critical of the levies' lack of discipline (*Mem.* 3.5.19); Plato (*Laws* 706b–d) and the Old Oligarch (*Ath. Pol.* 2.1) also appear to have had little regard for the city's heavy infantry. Thucydides admittedly once refers to Athenian forces as 'the first in skill of all the Greeks' (6.72.3), but the context is a speech in which Hermokrates of Syracuse tries to convince his fellow citizens to do something about the poor quality of their own militia. The speech is indirect, and Hornblower has suggested that the words come from Thucydides, not Hermokrates; considering the frequency in Thucydides of parallels between Syracuse and Athens, and between Hermokrates and Perikles, we should perhaps read it instead as advice for the *Athenians*, who were indeed caught up in a war with the best fighters of Greece. Seen in this light, his advice to reduce the number of generals and to start properly training the hoplites seems remarkably apt.[33] All this criticism may have run counter to civic ideology—Perikles boasted that the Athenians' courage made up for their lack of training (Thuc. 2.39.1), and Aristotle proclaimed that citizens, while inferior in skill, would always fight longer and harder than mercenaries (*Nik. Eth.* 1116b.7–9)—but many examples could be cited of panic and disorder in the Athenian ranks.[34] Diodoros claims that, on the march to Oinophyta in 457, Myronides deliberately left behind the latecomers of his own levy, arguing that those who showed no eagerness to join the expedition would also prove worthless in battle (11.81.5). At Tamynai in 349/8, some of Athens' hoplites seem to have been unwilling to stand by their own fellow citizens (Plut. *Phok.* 12.3). It should not be surprising if other commanders, too, had their doubts about these amateur warriors.

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[31] Anderson (1970, 142) called this battle plan 'calculated selfishness'. For the Peloponnesian League's lack of enthusiasm for Sparta's wars, see also for example Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.18; Isok. 14.15; Plut. *Ag.* 26.3–4; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.1.20–21.

[32] Later sources (Diod. 15.55.2; Plut. *Pel.* 23.1) claim that this deployment in echelon was already used at Leuktra.

[33] Hornblower 2008, 22, 34, 483–486. As Harris (2010, 411) has pointed out, the drawbacks of command by a board of generals, highlighted by Hermokrates, are repeatedly shown to affect the *Athenian* army at Syracuse.

We have no reason to assume that the armies of other city-states were any more reliable, unless they felt particularly committed to the outcome of the battle at hand. Occasional displays of suicidal tenacity notwithstanding,[35] hoplite levies from unwilling allies or an ill-disciplined *demos* could hardly be expected to keep order and stand their ground—much less to carry out additional commands in the heat of battle. Greek generals therefore prepared their armies for the clash as carefully as they could, and then sounded the charge, hoping for the best.[36]

The size and amateurism of the levy were some of the main reasons for its clumsiness in battle. It should follow that smaller armies did better. There is in fact some ground for the assumption that the more modestly sized expeditionary forces sent out by Athens in the fifth century may have consisted of better fighters than the levy as a whole. Firstly, these forces were drafted ἐκ καταλόγου, 'from the list'—that is, from the ranks of the leisured elite eligible for hoplite service.[37] These men at least theoretically had time to train for the task. Secondly, selection from the list was not random, and Wheeler has argued that the men chosen by their generals to accompany them on campaign would have been reliable veterans.[38] Several authors have suggested that the overall quality of Athenian armies deteriorated when, at some point during the fourth century, they replaced selection 'from the list' with a draft system based on year-groups.[39]

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[34] Van Wees (2004, 192) and Bettalli (2013, 432) have noted the discrepancy between Aristotle's claim and the evidence from historical accounts.

[35] Kimon's one hundred friends fought to the death at Tanagra (Plut. *Kim.* 17.4–5), as the Thespians did against the Athenians at Delion (Thuc. 4.96.3), and the men of Pellene against the Thespians at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.20). Aristotle (*Nik. Eth.* 1116b.15–25) regarded it as a particular strength of citizen militia that they were willing to keep fighting even to the death—though it is not clear what examples he had in mind.

[36] Whatley 1964, 133; Lazenby 1993, 250; Echeverría 2011, 46.

[37] Only those who fell into the top three Solonic property classes were legally obliged to serve. As Foxhall (1997, 129–131) and Van Wees (2001, 46–51, 61) have shown, even the least wealthy of these, the *zeugitai*, owned enough property to count as members of the leisure class.

[38] Wheeler 1991, 143; see also Hamel 1998, 25–26; Christ 2001, 401–402; 2006, 52.

The argument seems very plausible—but there is no evidence for the superior performance of these men.[40] As noted in Chapter 2, Kleon's troops at Amphipolis proved unable to carry out a wheeling manoeuvre, and the ensuing chaos resulted in their defeat. Other expeditionary forces, such as the armies dispatched to Potidaia and to Spartolos, did not show any tactical ingenuity despite their relatively small size. Only extended service in Sicily could turn the Athenians 'from the list' into warriors capable of moving in a hollow square (Thuc. 7.78.2). However, there is still no sign at any point in the Sicilian narrative of unit subdivision or subordinate officers below the level of the *lochos*. We may conclude that, regardless of their numbers, and even in the most prolonged and intense campaigns, militia armies tended to remain unwieldy masses of untrained warriors. To control a battle, Greek generals knew they needed troops of a different sort.

## The Tools of the Tactician

The Classical sources are littered with references to detachments of *logades*, or, from Xenophon onwards, *epilektoi*—the 'chosen ones'. Yet these picked troops have never been fully integrated into modern characterisations of Greek warfare. Droysen was the first to describe them as a counterweight to the tactical ineptitude of the general levy; however, his view was not adopted by later scholars, and it was not until Pritchett compiled a list of examples of these units that authors in the English-speaking world began to acknowledge their existence.[41] Despite the ensuing studies by Lawrence Tritle, James DeVoto and Nick Barley,[42] gathering references and analysing the functions of these troops, more recent works still do little more than point out the phenomenon without systematic study of its tactical purpose.[43] This seems to me a great oversight. The appearance and spread of the concept of picked troops during the Classical period both follows logically from the problematic realities of battle outlined above, and demonstrates the ways in which Greek military thought developed to deal with them.

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[39] Tritle 1989, 56; Hamel 1998, 26–28; Bertosa 2003; Crowley 2012, 27; for a description of the system see Vidal-Naquet 1986, 86–87; Christ 2001, 409–412.

[40] Christ (2001, 417–418) argued that the new draft method would actually have created *better* armies, but in fact there is no discernible change in the tactical abilities of the Athenian militia.

[41] Droysen 1889, 36–37; Pritchett 1974, 221–225. Note their complete absence in Grundy 1911 and Adcock 1957. Modern authorities such as Anderson (1970, 158–159) and Hanson (1989, 124–125) discuss only the Theban Sacred Band. The more extended analysis of Detienne (1968, 134–138) focuses on the origin and political role of these units.

[42] Tritle 1989; DeVoto 1992; Barley 2015.

Down to the late Archaic period, battle appears to have been an affair of individual warriors and small bands operating more or less independently. It is unlikely that the leisure-class armies of this period drew themselves up in deliberate formations or that they fought their battles according to an overall plan. The Greek approach to battle changed drastically when massed hoplites and true cavalry appeared in the course of the sixth century.[44] Large hoplite armies, to be effective against enemy hoplites and horsemen, needed to hold the line; they needed to retain their cohesion and play whatever part they were given in a concerted effort to win. Yet the merging of untrained forces into a single formation with a predetermined role meant that any change in the conditions of battle could be fatal. The militia was incapable of manoeuvre; it was too large to be commanded directly; if any part of it collapsed, it could drag all the rest down with it. How was the army to be protected against the uncertainties of battle? How were particular tactical missions to be carried out by a force that drew its strength from its sheer massive size?

This background explains the emergence of picked troops soon after large hoplite armies were first put in the field. Herodotos refers to the volunteers sent to relieve the Megarians in the prelude to Plataia as 'the three hundred *logades* of the Athenians' (9.21.3)[45]—suggesting it was no coincidence that, out of the whole army, it was these specific men who offered to help. There is nothing in the text to indicate that these hoplites had been specially prepared for any particular task; since they are seen only here, and are not mentioned even in Thucydides' enumeration of Athenian military strength at the start of the Peloponnesian War, it is unlikely that they were a standing force. Yet, even as a temporary unit composed of ordinary hoplites, their appearance has important implications. First, they represented a selection from the mass of the army. If this selection was made by their commander, the men were presumably chosen for their strength or skill, or for the quality of their equipment. If they volunteered, it means they stood out because of their eagerness to serve. As a result, in one way or another, they must have been more effective fighting men than the regular hoplite militia. Second, they were a separate detachment of three hundred men taken from an Athenian force of eight thousand. The number of three hundred was popular when it came to units of picked men, for reasons that remain obscure to us;[46] what matters here is that they were a small force, and that they were led by their own commander, implying that they were meant to be more easily managed and more flexibly employed than the main body of hoplites.[47]

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[43] As noted most recently by Barley (2015, 53–54); for examples of this continued marginalisation, see Van Wees 2004, 59–60; Hunt 2007, 144–145; Wheeler 2007c, 220. These authors seem to follow the example of Kromayer/Veith 1928, 44, 65.

[44] Greenhalgh 1973, 96–145, 147; Gaebel 2002, 58–60; Sheldon 2012, 44–47; Van Wees 2013, 240–244.

[45] Plutarch also mentions these *logades* (*Arist.* 14.3). They are called *epilektoi* by Diodoros (11.30.4). Pausanias (1.27.1) claims they were cavalry.

These two features define the practice of forming special detachments of hoplites and light troops—a practice that became ubiquitous in Classical Greece. The men were specially chosen, and they were chosen to deal with particular problems. Unfortunately we never find out how the selection process actually worked, and what made a man eligible to be picked; Aineias the Tactician (1.5) suggests physical fitness was the decisive factor.[48] However, the reason for raising a force of *logades* is often very explicit:

> καὶ οἱ μὲν (…) ἐξέτασίν τε ὅπλων ἐποιοῦντο καὶ ἑξακοσίους λογάδας τῶν ὁπλιτῶν ἐξέκριναν πρότερον (…) ὅπως τῶν τε Ἐπιπολῶν εἶεν φύλακες, καὶ ἢν ἐς ἄλλο τι δέῃ, ταχὺ ξυνεστῶτες παραγίγνωνται.
>
> [*The Syracusans*] held a review of their hoplites, from whom they first selected a picked force of six hundred (…) to guard Epipolai, and, if help was needed anywhere, to gather and get there quickly.
>
> THUC. 6.96.3[49]

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[46] Rubincam (1991, 185) expressed her hope to examine this phenomenon at some point, but to my knowledge she has not yet done so.

[47] The difficulty of moving large masses of men and the relative manoeuvrability of smaller units is stressed in Delbrück 1908, 7; Anderson 1970, 103 (citing Wellington); Pritchett 1974, 230 (citing Machiavelli); Goldsworthy 1997, 5; Lee 2004, 302–303.

[48] This is seen in practice at Xen. *An.* 4.3.20 and Diod. 14.56.5. Plutarch mentions a group of Spartan youths selected for being 'the most vigorous and strong of body' (Plut. *Ag.* 17.2), but these were only an honour guard for Agesilaos; they did not function as a separate tactical unit.

[49] These six hundred Syracusan picked troops may have had an earlier predecessor, if Diodoros (11.76.2) is not simply projecting Thucydides' testimony backwards in time.

> οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι (…) τριακοσίους μὲν σφῶν αὐτῶν λογάδας καὶ τῶν ψιλῶν τινὰς ἐκλεκτοὺς ὡπλισμένους προύταξαν θεῖν δρόμῳ ἐξαπιναίως πρὸς τὸ ὑποτείχισμα, ἡ δ᾽ ἄλλη στρατιὰ δίχα (…) ἐχώρουν …
>
> The Athenians (…) chose three hundred picked men of their own, and some well-armed light troops, to run suddenly to the counterwork, while the rest of the army (…) advanced in two parts …
>
> THUC. 6.100.1

Early in the Peloponnesian War, the Eleians sent a picked force of three hundred men to deal with Athenians ravaging their territory (Thuc. 2.25.3). Aristeus had picked troops around him at Potidaia, which he used to dash straight through his Athenian enemies on his way back to the city when the rest of his army was defeated (Thuc. 1.62.6). While Thucydides does not refer to them as *logades*, the four hundred hoplites and light troops placed in ambush by Demosthenes at Olpai must also have been specially selected for the purpose (3.107.3). The Spartan commander Brasidas, while gathering his army to march on Thrace in 424, used a picked force of three hundred men to try to secure Megara against the Athenians (Thuc. 4.70.3). During his campaign in Illyria the following year, he was not content merely to use his youngest hoplites to chase off his light-armed enemies (Thuc. 4.125.3); he also created a picked unit three hundred strong, with which he fought a successful rearguard action (Thuc. 4.127.2). He also used one hundred and fifty picked men to open the battle of Amphipolis with a solitary charge against the Athenian centre (Thuc. 5.4.4). Nikias attempted to force a strong position at Mende by drafting a small detachment of picked hoplites and missile troops and charging up the slope (Thuc. 4.129.4). When Agesilaos besieged Phleious in 380, a picked force of Phleiasians—again three hundred strong—kept order and stubbornly defended the city against him (Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.22).

In short, *logades* were formed to complete missions that a large, slow, barely controllable mass of warriors such as the hoplite levy could not carry out. The inclusion of particularly strong or skilled warriors was not as important as the formation of the unit as such—the placement of a distinct group of men under the direct command of a single officer, often the general himself. The small size of units of *logades* meant that they were able to retain good order and move quickly, making them perfectly suited to act as a reserve or as a strike force to seize the tactical initiative. These units reveal to us the true ambitions of Greek tactical thought.

The finest example of a unit of this kind was raised from the ranks of the Ten Thousand. All the roles given to *logades* in the examples above were taken on at some point by this mercenary army's six special *lochoi* of one hundred men, each composed of smaller sub-units led by a detailed hierarchy of officers.[50] Originally created to prevent chaos in the marching formation when the army made its way across a bridge or through a narrow defile (Xen. *An.* 3.4.21–23), they served in the course of the journey as a tactical reserve on the march, as shock troops of the vanguard and protectors of the rearguard (3.4.43, 4.2.11), and eventually as the components of a chequered first and a withheld second battle line (4.8.12–19, 6.5.9).

These deployments for battle are without parallel in Classical Greece; they evoked the admiration of the Prussians and continue to astonish scholars to this day.[51] The special *lochoi* of the Ten Thousand therefore tend to be regarded as an anomaly. Several of the Prussians struggled to offer some explanation for the fact that these units' evidently brilliant tactics failed to reappear at any point in Greek history. However, in light of all the examples cited above, these *lochoi* seem neither a strange development nor a puzzling dead end. Rather, they are only the most extreme exponent of the common Greek practice of selecting and organising small groups of warriors for specific tasks. No doubt their particular skill and ingenuity resulted from the fact that they were drawn from an army that already consisted of veteran mercenaries to begin with—mercenaries long led by Klearchos, a disciplinarian and a Spartan, who was eventually replaced by Cheirisophos, another Spartan. Even so, the more sophisticated of their tactical innovations occurred only in the later stages of the march, when the men of the special *lochoi* had served together through near-constant mortal danger for months on end. Their tactics remained unique simply because no other Greek force ever attained the necessary degree of discipline, experience and unit cohesion to adopt them.[52]

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[50] These units receive no special name or designation from Xenophon. In modern scholarship, they are sometimes erroneously referred to as *orthioi lochoi*, 'uphill units' or 'units in column'. Xenophon uses this term twice in the *Anabasis* (Xen. *An.* 4.2.11 and 4.8.12), but in both cases he is referring to a type of deployment rather than a specific body of men. In the second passage, in fact, he is describing the division of *the whole army* into separate *lochoi* deployed in column. The only other known use of the term is by Plutarch (*Dion* 45.3), in his description of Dion's assault on Syracuse in 356; the units in question were not picked troops either.

[51] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 155–158; Beloch 1897, 463–464; Droysen 1889, 47–48; Delbrück 1908, 138–139; Perlman 1976–1977, 268–269; Iapichino 1999, 95–96; Lee 2004, 299–300; Wheeler 2007c, 219.

[52] It may be objected that the Spartan army should have been able to match the abilities of the selected *lochoi* of the Ten Thousand, but nothing suggests that they did (see Lee

The picked troops of the Ten Thousand, then, developed their skills over time, compelled by the dire needs of circumstance. Dedicated training was the safer alternative. At Delion the Thebans already seem to have fielded a picked unit indicated specifically as the three hundred 'charioteers and chariot-fighters' (Diod. 12.70.1)—the distinct name implying that it was permanently established. While nothing is known about the unit, it may have suggested to the Argives the benefits of raising *logades* to the next level. All earlier picked troops appear to have been no more than temporary responses to circumstance; in 421, the Argives created a standing force no less than a thousand strong, trained and maintained at the expense of the state (Diod. 12.75.7).[53] The decades that followed saw the proliferation of this idea, with elite standing units being raised in Thebes, Elis, Phleious, the newly formed Arkadian League, and possibly, at an unknown date in the fourth century, at Athens.[54] These units were a very different creature from the improvised *logades* of earlier times. As Tritle put it, they were 'not just a volunteer force of eager citizen soldiers, but rather a veteran force best described as shock troops'.[55] The famous Theban *epilektoi*, known to later tradition as the Sacred Band, exemplify their functions.[56] We are told that they were initially raised to provide the Theban phalanx with an unflinching first rank (Plut. *Pel.* 19.3–4), but they fought alone at Tegyra (*Pel.* 17.2) and possibly earlier at Thespiai (Polyain. *Strat.* 2.5.2), protecting Boiotian territory with only some cavalry in support. If Plutarch is to be believed, they were first upon the enemy at Leuktra (*Pel.* 23.2). Xenophon reports how they led the way in an assault on the gates of Corinth in 369 (*Hell.* 7.1.18–19). At Chaironeia a generation later, they allegedly held the

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2007, 86–88). While the Spartiates probably exercised together in tightly knit groups from an early age, this exercise seems to have been mostly athletic (Hodkinson 2006, 134–138), and their documented reluctance to actually go out and fight (Van Wees 2004, 45, 83–85; Ray 2009, 287) meant that few of them would have had much combat experience, at least until the decline of their power in the mid-fourth century forced them to march out themselves more and more often.

[53] They are first seen in action at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.67.2, 5.73.2–3).

[54] For lists of attestations see Pritchett 1974, 221–225; Tritle 1989, 54–55; DeVoto 1992, 5–6. Christ (2001, 418) rejected Tritle's view that the Athenian *epilektoi* were a standing force.

[55] Tritle 1989, 57.

[56] Leitao (2002) has offered a sobering analysis of the traditions surrounding these *epilektoi*, rejecting both their military prominence and their legendary nature as a unit made up entirely of homosexual couples. He is probably right to urge caution, but I believe his observations only support my impression of the Sacred Band (so-called or otherwise) as a typical example of *epilektoi*.

extreme right of the Greek line, anchoring the army's flank on the Kephisos, where Alexander destroyed them.[57]

It may be tempting to take the appearance of *epilektoi* as a sign of increasing professionalism in Greek warfare. Some city-states were clearly willing to invest in standing forces to enhance their overall tactical capabilities. However, firstly, we should be careful not to overstate the level of skill of *epilektoi*. We know practically nothing about the training they received. The only direct information comes from Diodoros' account of the Thousand of Argos: in line with the ideals of hoplite training we find elsewhere, the men selected were those 'who had the strongest body and were the richest', and they simply 'exercised' (γυμνάζεσθαι) to become 'athletes in the work of war' (Diod. 12.75.7). It seems likely that the training of other such units, too, was primarily athletic—and that, like other hoplite forces, they never learned unit drill. The picked men of Phleious once showed themselves capable of running in formation (Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.22), but no other force of *epilektoi* is ever said to have performed any such feat of unit cohesion, let alone a formation evolution. Secondly, we will do well to bear in mind Pritchett's sobering remark that 'the emergence of such elite corps is mute testimony to the amateur nature of the remainder of the troops'.[58] *Epilektoi* are as much a sign of increasing reliance on capable fighters as they are an indication of Greek awareness that the mass levy could not be expected to perform well if it was asked to carry out more complex tasks.

In support of this interpretation we may note the complete absence of these types of picked troops at Sparta. The Spartan army's unusual level of organisation and discipline meant that, in situations where other city-states tended to field picked forces, the Spartans were satisfied to use the component units of their regular phalanx. To guard a pass, garrison a city, or seize a strategic position, they sent their own *lochoi* or *morai*.[59] There is no indication that even the one hundred men led by Brasidas to save Lakonian Methone from Athenian raiders in 431 were specially selected.[60] The Spartans' faith in the general quality of their hoplites is exemplified by the fact that the men sent to

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[57] Diod. 16.86.2–4; Plut. *Pel.* 18.5; *Alex.* 9.2, 12.3. The range of tasks they performed argues strongly against DeVoto's view (1992, 6, 11–15, 17) that their exclusive purpose was to charge at the enemy's leading troops in pitched battle.

[58] Pritchett 1974, 221; the point was made earlier by Droysen (1889, 36–37).

[59] Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.17, 4.5.3–5, 5.4.46, 7.1.15–17, 7.4.20–21.

[60] Thuc. 2.25.1. Brasidas did use picked troops during his campaign in Thrace, as noted above; arguably this was because his forces did not consist of Lakedaimonian militia, but of freed helots and mercenaries. His methods, however, were certainly not 'orthodox Spartan tactics' (Wylie 1992c, 86–87).

Sphakteria were not hand-picked, but ἀποκληρώσαντες, 'chosen by lot' (Thuc. 4.8.9). Where particular fitness was required—usually to ward off light-armed attackers—Spartan armies were arranged in such a way that the youngest of the hoplites could be ordered to charge out from the ranks, seemingly at a moment's notice.[61] Generally speaking, Spartan militia armies seem to have been able to respond to circumstance perfectly well with the forces they had at hand. What use did they have for *epilektoi*?

Indeed, when we look at the elite troops of the Spartan army, we find that they were units of a very different nature. The famous three hundred picked Spartiates called *hippeis*, first seen in 479 (Hdt. 8.142.3), were effectively an honour guard. Their name has led scholars to believe they must have been the successors of an Archaic unit made up of horse-owners, and their high status is never questioned.[62] There is only one possible occasion, as early as the 460s, where they may have served as an 'elite strike force' similar to the *epilektoi* fielded by other city-states in later decades—but it is not at all clear whether the three hundred men involved were in fact the *hippeis*.[63] In all other cases where they figure in a combat situation—and there are only two, at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.72.4, 73.2) and Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14)—their role is that of a royal hoplite bodyguard. They are stationed around the king in the battle line; they are not given separate orders at any point; they are never seen performing any manoeuvre independent from the rest of the phalanx.[64] The late testimony of Dionysios of Halikarnassos (*Rom. Arch.* 2.13.1) confirms that their purpose was to protect the king. It seems more fitting to compare these men to the thousand picked Immortals at Plataia than to any of the other picked detachments mentioned here.[65]

The other Spartan elite unit, the enigmatic Skiritai, appear at first glance to have been more like other picked troops. However, they were different in two important respects. Firstly, while Diodoros plainly refers to them as

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[61] Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.14–16, 5.4.40, 6.5.31. Only the last of these appear to have been selected in advance. Mercenary forces led by Spartan commanders were apparently trained to function in a similar way: see Thuc. 4.125.3, 4.127.2; Xen. *An.* 4.2.16, 6.5.4, 7.3.46; *Hell.* 3.4.23.

[62] Worley 1994, 23–25; Figueira 2006, 61, 67–68; Sidnell 2006, 28; Hunt 2007, 144 n. 162.

[63] Hdt. 9.64.2, as interpreted by Figueira (2006, 60).

[64] Kelly (1981, 37–38) has suggested that the men led by Amompharetos at Plataia were misidentified by Herodotos, and were actually the *hippeis*, but there is no evidence to support this theory.

[65] As noted above (n. 46), Plutarch reports another Spartan honour guard, fifty strong, that was sent to Agesilaos in 394. It, too, fought around the king at Koroneia instead of operating independently (Plut. *Ag.* 17.2, 18.3).

Spartiate *epilektoi* (15.32.1), various sources suggest that they were not Spartan citizens, or even Lakedaimonians, but Arkadians drafted from a region on the border between Lakonia and Tegea.[66] This means they were neither Spartiates nor picked troops—unless they were 'picked' in the same sense that the five thousand *perioikoi* at Plataia or the two thousand *neodamodeis* that went to Asia Minor with Agesilaos were 'picked', that is, taken from a population that could potentially send more.[67] They were not a standing force of citizens, but a regional levy assigned a specific function in large Spartan armies. Secondly, while the ancients credit the Skiritai with a range of military roles typical for picked troops, these roles are all remarkably specific, and all of them are assigned categorically rather than in response to a particular situation. The Skiritai always held the left of the line according to Thucydides (5.67.1); they scouted the way and guarded the camp according to Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 12.3); they acted as a tactical reserve according to Diodoros (15.32.1). These are the sort of tasks for which other city-states might select a unit of picked troops, yet the Skiritai—again, neither specially selected nor a standing force—appear to have specialised in them. Xenophon assures us the Spartans worked them to the bone (*Kyr.* 4.2.1). It seems, then, that the Spartans on campaign availed themselves of a mobile infantry elite that compared to the *epilektoi* of other states in much the same way that Spartan hoplites compared to most Greek heavy infantry. They were not a professional force to be used when the need arose; they were a militia unit whose specific duty was to make sure the need never arose. It is a shame that we know almost nothing about their actual operational history,[68] for the hints we are given suggest that the Skiritai represent a fascinating alternative direction in the development of Greek specialist troops.

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[66] While Thucydides seems to group them with the Lakedaimonians (Thuc. 5.67.1), Xenophon lists the components of the Spartan expeditionary army sent to Olynthos in 383 as '*neodamodeis* and those of the *perioikoi* and those of the Skiritai', suggesting that the latter were in a separate category from the Lakedaimonian *perioikoi* (Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.24). An inscription from the Hellenistic period implies that the Skiritai self-identified as Arkadians (*Syll.*$^3$ II 665, 32–38), and a gloss by Hesychios of Alexandria tells us this outright (Sekunda 2014a, 60–61 and n. 24). See also Anderson 1970, 249–251; Gomme/Andrewes/Dover 1970, 103–104; Shipley 2004, 577.

[67] Hdt. 9.11.3; Plut. *Ag.* 6.2; see also the 'picked' allied contingents gathered against Argos in 418 (Thuc. 5.60.3) and the 'picked' Athenian army at Syracuse (Thuc. 6.68.2), which was later to select its own *logades*.

[68] They are only seen in action at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.72.1–3) and briefly during Agesilaos' Theban campaign of 377 (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.52–53). Scholars in fact disagree over what troop type the Skiritai were; it is generally assumed that they were hoplites, but Wheeler (1983, 7) seems to have believed they were cavalry, while Sekunda (2014, 61–64) has rather implausibly argued that they were *hamippoi*.

Thanks to the abilities of their ordinary troops and the efforts of the Skiritai, the Spartans did not need to field *logades*; there is no sign that they ever did. For the same reasons, the transformation of particular units into standing forces never occurred at Sparta. For other city-states, however, the selection of *logades* and the later formation of units of *epilektoi* were crucial ways to provide their community and their armies with a reliable, readily available force of infantry capable of more than just head-on charges. The elaboration of this idea, and the allocation of state funds for the purpose, was one of the most significant military developments of the Classical period.

It should be stressed, though, that units of *logades*—the few who could be relied upon to do more than the bare minimum required of a Classical Greek warrior—never made up more than a very small minority of any army; indeed, that their small size was essential to their ability to function better than the army as a whole. The other thousands formed a brave mass at best, and a reluctant and panicky one at worst. It is against this background that we should examine the battle tactics actually employed by the Greeks.

## How to Win

It has been one of the great virtues of recent scholarship on Greek warfare to acknowledge that, contrary to the old Prussian model, 'almost all of the large battles of the fifth and fourth centuries BC were characterised by manoeuvre of some form.'[69] Many of these manoeuvres were planned out in advance; units were set out in such a way that, if they simply attacked the enemy in front of them, they would automatically play the role they were intended to play. This hardly serves to create an image of Greek tactical sophistication. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the battle plans behind the Greeks' careful deployments tended to take one of just two forms: either the enemy was to be outflanked, or his best troops were to be directly engaged and destroyed. But this is where tactical responses to a developing situation come into play. Strikingly, all examples of battle tactics found in the sources can be explained as deliberate attempts to prevent the enemy from succeeding at one or the other of the two basic Greek battle plans.

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[69] Rawlings 2007, 90; see Lendon 2005, 81–85; Wheeler 2007c, 215–219; Echeverría 2011, 45–47.

The earliest battle described in our sources may have been won by tactics. After the initial charge of the Greeks at Marathon, their victorious wings turned inward, crushing the Persian force that had just overrun their weak centre (Hdt. 6.113). The sheer apparent genius of this manoeuvre has led some to assume it was premeditated, or at least carefully orchestrated during the clash; seen in this way, the battle becomes a prime example of a tactical response to a critical breakthrough.[70] This seems a highly optimistic interpretation of such an early engagement; in his description of the deployment for battle, Herodotos states only that the Greeks managed to match the width of the Persian line, which cost them the depth of their centre. But it is hard to deny that the decision to come to the aid of the rest of the army seems to have been consciously made by both the Plataians on the left and the Athenians with the polemarch Kallimachos on the right. The move implies notable battlefield awareness and tactical control. Herodotos stresses that both wings allowed their fleeing opponents to escape—no mean feat for men ecstatic with victory—in order to turn and save the part of the line that was in danger (6.113.2).[71] Perhaps the manoeuvre was made possible by the fact that both wings were relatively small in size, and were led by their own commanders; however this may be, their undoubtedly independent action effectively countered the Persian exploitation of a serious flaw in the Greek deployment. We do not know if their initial preoccupation with achieving the greatest possible formation width was a response to their experiences in earlier large-scale battles; all we can say is that Marathon would have shown them the dangers of going too far down this path. By the time of Plataia, the Athenians were clearly on guard against threats to the integrity of the line. It was the imminent collapse of the Megarian contingent in the centre that prompted the Athenian *logades* and archers to rush into action.

When the fog lifts on the general course of battles, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the system of tactical responses to basic battle plans appears fully developed. The four earliest land battles described in detail by Thucydides reveal the methods that had been devised. At Potidaia, the Corinthian general Aristeus arranged for his mounted allies to strike the Athenians in the rear as they advanced on his army; when prompt Athenian action forestalled them, Aristeus, who had won the infantry engagement only on his own flank, was able to pull his picked hoplites together in a tight body to break through Athenian lines and reach the safety of the city (Thuc. 1.62–63). At Olpai, five years later, Demosthenes prepared against the Peloponnesians who were set to envelop his right wing by selecting four hundred hoplites and light troops to place in ambush, hidden in a hollow road alongside the battlefield, ready to charge into the enemy's backs. He himself chose to face the danger on the right wing of the line until the trap was sprung (Thuc. 3.107.3–4). At Solygeia (Thuc. 4.42–44), when the Corinthian left began to crumble, a *lochos* arrived to reinforce it; if this unit was the detachment that Thucydides reports was initially left behind to guard the town, it must have served as a mobile hoplite reserve rather than a passive defence. Still, in the end, the Corinthians' lack of cavalry proved their undoing—though unfortunately Thucydides does not tell us exactly how. He is clearer on the role of horsemen at Delion the following year. As the Theban commander's deep right wing slowly crushed the Athenians, he noticed his line being rolled up from his shattered left; he consequently ordered two units of cavalry to gallop around the hill behind him and fall upon the encircling Athenians' rear. The Athenians, already in confusion due to their clumsy wheeling manoeuvre, saw the horsemen coming and panicked (Thuc. 4.96.3–8). They were unable to recover.

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[70] Evans 1993, 285–287; Lazenby 1993, 250; Krentz 2010, 157–158.

[71] Lazenby (1989, 60) suggested that after their long charge the hoplites were simply too exhausted to pursue their fleeing enemies—but this is odd, since they actually did, right after the Persian centre was defeated (Hdt. 6.113.2).

The manoeuvres of these early battles involve small detachments only. This fact may well be the reason why scholars have traditionally ignored them in their accounts of Greek tactical developments; it is not until First Mantineia that we see something resembling large-scale manoeuvre, and not until the Nemea that such manoeuvre appears deliberate. The assumption is therefore that the clumsy experiments of the former engagement were a lesson learned by the time of the latter, and that the fourth century saw the first battle plans worthy of the name.[72] Yet such an analysis does no justice to the efforts of countless Greek commanders to deal with the military realities outlined above. For six decades, between Plataia and First Mantineia, we get no details of any pitched battle involving the anomalous Spartan army; it is no surprise that they turn out on their reappearance to do things that other hoplite armies have never done. However, this does not mean that they were alone in their ability to *conceive* of such things. The difference was merely that a far larger part of their army had the organisation and training required to contribute to their manoeuvres.

The move seen at First Mantineia, then, was much like the others in principle, if significantly larger in scale:

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[72] Grundy 1911, 273; Adcock 1957, 88; Anderson 1970, 141–142; Lazenby 1985, 125, 143; 1993, 250–251 (although others have stressed the unusual features of Delion in particular: see Delbrück 1908, 117; Beck 1931, 195–196; Hanson 1988, 196–197; Lendon 2005, 83).

> δείσας δὲ Ἆγις μὴ σφῶν κυκλωθῇ τὸ εὐώνυμον, καὶ νομίσας ἄγαν περιέχειν τοὺς Μαντινέας, τοῖς μὲν Σκιρίταις καὶ Βρασιδείοις ἐσήμηνεν ἐπεξαγαγόντας ἀπὸ σφῶν ἐξισῶσαι τοῖς Μαντινεῦσιν, ἐς δὲ τὸ διάκενον τοῦτο παρήγγελλεν ἀπὸ τοῦ δεξιοῦ κέρως δύο λόχους τῶν πολεμάρχων Ἱππονοΐδᾳ καὶ Ἀριστοκλεῖ ἔχουσι παρελθεῖν καὶ ἐσβαλόντας πληρῶσαι ...
>
> Afraid that his left might be surrounded, and thinking that the Mantineians outflanked it too far, Agis signalled to the Skiritai and Brasideioi to lead out until they were even with the Mantineians, and told the polemarchs Hipponoidas and Aristokles to fill the gap by throwing themselves into it with two *lochoi* from the right wing ...
>
> THUC. 5.71.3

In other words, designated units were sent to salvage a threatened flank, as they had been at Olpai, Solygeia and Delion, and as they would be again many years later at Second Mantineia (Diod. 15.85.8). The difference was that they refused to go. The Skiritai and the Brasideioi moved left, but the two *lochoi* would not leave their stations to fill the gap. As a result, the isolated left wing was surrounded and cut to pieces—but this is where king Agis performed the feat that genuinely makes this battle remarkable. Once the Argives and others deployed over against him had been routed, he managed to wheel *his entire army* to go to the rescue of his left wing (παραγγεῖλαι παντὶ τῷ στρατεύματι χωρῆσαι ἐπὶ τὸ νικώμενον, Thuc. 5.73.2). Again, his tactics are not conceptually different from what happened at Solygeia and Delion—but their sheer scale had not been seen since Marathon, where the outcome occurred only as the cumulative effect of local decisions. Here, it was deliberate. This manoeuvre was far beyond the ability of any other hoplite levy; only the Ten Thousand would later be able to contemplate similar moves in an ongoing battle (Xen. *An.* 1.10.6, 9–10). When they saw him coming, Agis' enemies promptly fled (Thuc. 5.73.3).[73]

As an expression of military thought, Agis' initial shift to the left does appear to have been unique in one respect. According to Thucydides, it was carried out specifically to correct the phalanx's tendency to drift to the right, which exposed the left wing to encirclement (5.71.3). This tendency sounds like it ought to have been a matter of some concern to all Greek commanders, yet there is no other recorded instance of anyone giving it any thought. Indeed, at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.19) and—according to Plutarch—at Leuktra (*Pel.*

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[73] Harris (2015, 89–90) has highlighted the Spartan superiorty in command and control at First Mantineia.

23.1–2), the Spartans intentionally made the rightward drift *worse*, marching out to the right in column to ensure that their entire right wing would be free to wheel inward and strike the enemy in the flank.[74] Why was Agis' approach so radically different?

The conditions of the battle may explain his tactics. At the Nemea and at Leuktra the Spartan centre and left were held by unreliable allies whose troops were of a far lesser standard than the Lakedaimonian hoplites themselves. The Spartan plan in these battles was therefore to use their allies as little more than bait while they performed the crucial manoeuvre themselves, encircling the enemy's left flank and rolling up his line from there. At First Mantineia, the situation was different. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Spartan king placed himself in the centre of his line in order to face the Argives head-on; he did not care to achieve flank overlap for his own right wing, because that was never how he meant to win the battle. Moreover, a breakthrough on his left would seriously threaten his own Spartan contingent in the centre. In these particular circumstances, we can understand his choice to try to save his left rather than extend his army further toward the right. Agis' original intention also explains why he felt compelled to achieve this objective by ordering a complicated sideways manoeuvre instead of simply marching his whole army left in column. If he marched away from the advancing Argives, it could all too easily be taken as cowardice or flight.[75] He had to find a less conspicuous way to rearrange his line. In the event, his manoeuvre failed, and his left was lost; yet Agis' forces were still able to respond to this calamity, while his enemies lacked the discipline to recover from their success.[76]

Again, though, despite their inability to emulate the Spartans' general manoeuvres, commanders from other city-states understood their purpose perfectly well.[77] In his account of the battle of the Nemea, Xenophon claims the Boiotian rightward drift was just as deliberate as that of the Spartans they faced:

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[74] Anderson 1970, 211–213; Lazenby 1985, 134, 139–140, 143; Hutchinson 2000, 170; Wheeler 2007c, 217–218; Echeverría 2011, 67.

[75] According to Xenophon (*An.* 4.8.16–19), the Kolchians, drawn up against the Ten Thousand, moved troops away from their centre in an attempt to reinforce their flanks; the Greek centre assumed they were running away and charged, routing the enemy army.

[76] Lazenby 1989, 70–71. Note, too, how the victorious parts of the allied army at the Nemea were unable to respond in any way to the Spartans sweeping across the battlefield (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.21–22; Anderson 1970, 148–149), and how the victorious Argives at the Long Walls of Corinth promptly panicked and fled when they heard that the intact Spartan contingent was advancing on their rear (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11–12).

[77] Rawlings 2007, 90.

> … ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἦγον ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιά, ὅπως ὑπερέχοιεν τῷ κέρατι τῶν πολεμίων: οἱ δ’ Ἀθηναῖοι, ἵνα μὴ διασπασθείησαν, ἐπηκολούθουν, καίπερ γιγνώσκοντες ὅτι κίνδυνος εἴη κυκλωθῆναι.
>
> … and they led off to the right, in order to encircle the enemy with their wing; and the Athenians, to avoid being separated, followed after, although they knew they were in danger of being surrounded.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 4.2.18

It is worth emphasising the assumed level of tactical awareness here. The Thebans set out to win the battle by rolling up the enemy’s left flank, which the Athenians recognised for the reckless plan it was. This observation was likely shared by the Eleians on the extreme left of the Spartan line as the command came down to follow towards the right. Yet neither contingent could do anything to salvage the situation. No picked troops or reserves are reported; considering the establishment of a fixed depth among the allied contingents, which served specifically to prevent a general encirclement, it seems likely that all hoplites were committed to ensure the maximum width of the line. It is not known what happened to the more than fifteen hundred allied cavalry reported by Xenophon (*Hell.* 4.2.16–17—a force more than twice the size of the mounted element in the Spartan army); somehow they were rendered incapable of influencing the fight.[78] The Athenians were left no other option but to march to their doom according to the Boiotian plan. They lacked the training to do what the Spartans could do—to control the movement of the entire hoplite line and turn it towards the oncoming threat.

There are a few examples of single contingents making their own tactical decisions when overall battlefield cohesion had broken down. Aristeus’ picked hoplites drew themselves together for a final dash back to Potidaia after the rest of the army had been defeated (Thuc. 1.63.1). At Koroneia, the Thebans similarly decided to tighten their formation and face Agesilaos head-on after they discovered that the rest of their army had fled to the slopes of Mount Helikon, which was now behind the Spartan line. Both sides suffered heavy losses, but some Thebans managed to get through (Xen. *Hell* 4.3.18–19).[79] At Tegyra in 375, when Pelopidas' heavily outnumbered Sacred Band decided on a frontal charge of the same kind, the Spartans who opposed them understandably assumed that these Thebans, too, were only trying to get away to safety. By consequence, when the leading Spartan officers were killed, the remaining ones resolved to do what Xenophon says Agesilaos should have done at Koroneia—they opened up the ranks, hoping to cut down the enemy as they passed. Yet when they increased their file interval, Pelopidas seized his chance to destroy the Spartan formation from within (Plut. *Pel.* 17.3–4). At Kerkyra in 373 we see mercenaries in Spartan service respond in a very different way to an imminent breakthrough:

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[78] Anderson (1970, 148) suggested that perhaps all Spartan cavalry was deployed on the right flank to block their Athenian counterparts, but he still could not explain what happened to the Boiotian horse. Unsuitable ground may have been more of a factor (Sidnell 2006, 54). Diodoros (14.82.10–83.1) claims the cavalry on both sides was only five hundred strong, making it plausible that they cancelled each other out—but such a low total of Boiotian and Athenian horsemen is difficult to believe.

> ἄλλοι δ' ἐκδραμόντες καθ' ἑτέρας πύλας ἐπιτίθενται ἀθρόοι τοῖς ἐσχάτοις: οἱ δ' ἐπ' ὀκτὼ τεταγμένοι, ἀσθενὲς νομίσαντες τὸ ἄκρον τῆς φάλαγγος ἔχειν, ἀναστρέφειν ἐπειρῶντο.
>
> Others ran out by the other gates and massed to attack those at the far end of the line. These men, who were drawn up eight deep, thought the outer end of the phalanx was too weak, and tried to swing it around on itself.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 6.2.20

Unfortunately this scheme backfired as well. The manoeuvre involved first countermarching half of the unit, then moving it behind the line, so as to double its depth; yet the enemy interpreted their about-face as the beginning of a rout, and as they charged into the mercenaries' backs, it became one.

A distinct pattern emerges from these engagements. While Echeverría was right to stress that phalanxes could continue to operate effectively even when partly broken,[80] the inspired actions of individual detachments could not change the outcome of a battle if the army was already falling apart. It required the intelligent use of a substantial contingent still in good order to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

The Spartans famously managed to do just that at First Mantineia and the Nemea; through superior tactical control they effectively countered their enemies' initially successful encirclement on the right. At the Long Walls of

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[79] Curiously, the essential word συσπειραθέντες, 'formed up close together', does not appear in the otherwise identical account of Xen. *Ag.* 2.11–12.

[80] Echeverría 2011, 68.

Corinth, too, they were able to make up for the collapse of their entire centre by wheeling and striking the victorious Argives in the flank (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11). Yet at Tegyra, Leuktra and Second Mantineia they proved unable to defend themselves against the other of the Greeks' two basic battle plans—the direct assault on the leading part of the enemy force. The greater effectiveness of this plan was made clear especially at Second Mantineia, where the Thebans appear to have tried both expedients at the same time. Their cavalry surrounded and routed the left of the enemy phalanx while their massed hoplites charged against the right; but an Eleian cavalry reserve ended up thwarting their encircling move on the left, while Epameinondas' head-on assault did succeed in breaking the Spartan right.[81] It seems reasonable for the Greeks to have concluded that brute force yielded better results than manoeuvre. But how could this crude and well-known approach repeatedly confound the finest hoplites of Greece?

Part of the answer lies in the probable fact that the Theban vanguard did not consist of normal hoplite militia. Xenophon may not mention them in his battle descriptions, but it seems unlikely that the Thebans would not use their experienced *epilektoi* in pitched battle; Plutarch tells us outright that at Tegyra (*Pel.* 17.2) and Leuktra (*Pel.* 23.2) the Spartan line was directly attacked by the Sacred Band.[82] The Spartans had not had to grapple with so formidable an opponent for generations. At First Mantineia, while the Thousand of Argos did manage to break the extreme left of the Spartan contingent, the Argive militia deployed against king Agis fled without fighting at all; at Koroneia, again, the Argives chose to run rather than face their Spartan enemies in combat. At the Nemea, the Spartans manoeuvred themselves into a position from which they could immediately surround and rout the Athenians who opposed them; Agesilaos was later told that only eight Lakedaimonians had been killed (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.1). Xenophon appears to have felt that the efforts of the Corinthians who faced the Spartans at the Long Walls of Corinth were unworthy of being recorded.[83] Spartan defeats in the Classical period up to Tegyra were invariably the result of surprise attacks, ambushes, or attacks by light-armed troops. Simply put, the Spartans were not used to being resisted in pitched battle. The Theban citizen hoplites had tried it to their cost at Koroneia—but the Sacred Band was more equal to the task.[84]

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[81] Xenophon's account (*Hell.* 7.5.24–25) barely discusses the allied left, and credits Athenian cavalry with its protection; Diodoros (15.85.4–8), however, describes the changing fortunes on the wing in some detail.

[82] See also Diod. 15.55.2 and 4; Lendon 2005, 108. DeVoto (1992, 15) argued that this was the main purpose of the Sacred Band, and assumed they played the same role at Second Mantineia.

[83] He mentions their place in the line (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10) but we hear nothing more about them. The Spartans are shown wheeling towards the centre, suggesting that their immediate opponents had already fled.

The Theban deployment for battle was even more significant. At Tegyra and Leuktra, their cavalry was launched ahead of the hoplites to disrupt the Spartan formation in the manner of a cascading charge. They were particularly successful at Leuktra, where they drove the Spartans' own cavalry back into the ranks of the phalanx, no doubt causing considerable confusion (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.10–11). If Diodoros is right, the cavalry on the Theban right flank at Second Mantineia also managed to drive its counterpart into the hoplite lines, although from the wing rather than from the front (Diod. 15.85.8). Next, at Leuktra and Second Mantineia, the Thebans advanced rapidly with their hoplites formed up in a deep phalanx. By referring to this formation as a 'ram' which advanced 'like a trireme' (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.22–23), and by stressing the 'pushing of the mob' (6.4.14), Xenophon conjures an evocative image, but one we should not take too literally. As noted in Chapter 4 above, it is from his work that we learn that the purpose of depth was to increase moral, not physical, strength.[85] In this case, however, it may also have served as a patch for one of the tactical shortcomings of the hoplite militia. The Spartans' chief advantage in battle lay in their ability to command and manoeuvre large groups of men; other Greeks could not replicate this without introducing Spartan-style officer hierarchies and basic formation drill. But troops that were close to their commanders might still be expected to follow his orders and his example. A block of hoplites may therefore have been more easily maintained and controlled than a line.[86] The Thebans may have drawn up their hoplites in a deep formation partly because it helped to give them some semblance of the cohesion and manoeuvrability that otherwise remained a Spartan privilege.

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[84] Due to prolonged military experience, and even some individual training (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23), the whole Theban contingent at Second Mantineia seems to have been significantly more capable than the average hoplite militia; note their formation evolutions (7.5.22) and the innovation of forming up in echelon (7.5.23).

[85] See especially Goldsworthy 1997, 13–14; Matthew 2012, 230–237. Polyainos' famous story (2.3.2) that Epameinondas won at Leuktra by calling on his men to give him 'one step forward, and we will have victory' need not imply that the mechanics of battle revolved around sheer mass; in any other reconstruction, too, a sudden coordinated lunge against the first rank of an enemy phalanx could have a decisive effect.

[86] As implicitly noted by Xenophon (*An.* 4.8.10–13; *Kyr.* 7.5.5); see Delbrück 1908, 32; Kromayer/Veith 1931, 322; Goldsworthy 1997, 7–8, 24–25; Rusch 2011, 198.

The relative flexibility of a hoplite block would certainly help to explain the speed with which the Theban left is supposed to have fallen upon the Spartan line at Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.13; Diod. 15.55.3; Plut. *Pel.* 23.4). This quick advance was critical to the plan.[87] Once contact had been made, the Spartans were no longer able to manoeuvre, unless they could somehow manage to disengage—and attempting to do so might result in a rout of the kind seen on Kerkyra. They were consequently forced to slug it out with the Thebans in the hope of breaking them and getting their hands free. Yet this head-on battle of moral and physical attrition was exactly the sort of fight for which a deep formation was ideally suited—the sort of fight, in fact, which it could not lose. Pinned down in close combat, the Spartans' only hope was to try to get orders through to those parts of the phalanx that were not fighting the narrow Theban column, to wheel around its flanks or otherwise come to the aid of the embattled *morai* around the king.

To extinguish this last hope is the true meaning of Epameinondas' professed aim to 'crush the head of the snake'. Xenophon may have insisted that Spartans could fight well even when their battle order was lost (*Lak. Pol.* 11.7),[88] but in fact the strong focus of their upbringing on unquestioning obedience made them unusually vulnerable to the decapitation of their chain of command. Not knowing what to do, they tended to make bad decisions, or no decisions at all.[89] This breakdown of the Spartan command system gave Pelopidas the victory at Tegyra (Plut. *Pel.* 17.3–4); it gave the Arkadians the victory at Kromnos in 365, when the second in command to a wounded Archidamos made a truce despite outnumbering the enemy (Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.24–25). Many scholars have pointed out in general terms that the Theban plan at Leuktra and Second Mantineia was to attack the enemy general and the core of his army,[90] but their analyses seem to have missed that such a plan would have been perfectly suited to counter the main tactical advantage of the Spartans in battle. The very fact that the Spartans normally *retained* the ability to manoeuvre meant that the loss of their general and his immediate replacements could paralyse the rest of the army, or at best reduce it to being driven by sheer forward momentum, like any other Greek militia army. Such an army would be a less daunting opponent for a deep Theban phalanx, possibly spearheaded by *epilektoi* and certainly supported by a strong cavalry force. As Xenophon summed up the Theban plan, 'they reckoned that if they could conquer those around the king, all the others would be easy to overcome' (λογιζόμενοι ὡς εἰ νικήσειαν τὸ περὶ τὸν βασιλέα, τὸ ἄλλο πᾶν εὐχείρωτον ἔσοιτο, *Hell.* 6.4.12).

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[87] Matthew 2012, 236.

[88] See also Xen. *Sym.* 8.35. Plutarch, perhaps inspired by Xenophon's claim in the *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*, actually brings this up in the middle of his description of Leuktra (*Pel.* 23.3).

[89] Humble 2006, 227–229.

[90] Kromayer/Veith 1931, 319–322; Cartledge 1987, 240; DeVoto 1989, 116–117; 1992, 6; Wheeler 1991, 146; Buckler 1993, 106; Hutchinson 2000, 169, 172.

In short, a variation on Hanson's explanation for Thebes' famous successes seems to me the most correct: the Thebans deliberately combined a set of well-known tactics in response to Spartan methods that would have become predictable by the time of Leuktra.[91] There is, of course, little explicit evidence to back this theory, and it certainly does not instantly resolve all the historiographical problems surrounding Leuktra that have vexed so many scholars for so long. However, this reconstruction of events has the great merit of making sense within the actual context of Classical Greek tactics, without supposing or requiring any ground-breaking innovations for which we have no clear evidence. It explains the events at Leuktra by supposing only that the Thebans recognised the limited capabilities of their citizen levy and drew on familiar and easily implemented measures to increase its chances of victory. The battle plan was built on tried and tested expedients: the deep formation, the strike against the enemy's key contingent, and the practice of leaving tough tasks to picked troops. While the Thebans appear to have abandoned the older notion of using a detached reserve to decide the issue—relying instead on turning their main hoplite contingent into an arguably more manoeuvrable block—they still cannot be shown to have introduced any element to the known parameters of Greek warfare. Their thorough understanding of the tactical situation led them to formulate the simplest possible plan for their hoplite militia. As Lazenby put it, 'all the Thebans had to do was advance'.[92]

Indeed, Theban tactics seem to fit entirely within the familiar framework of the two basic approaches to pitched battle—the encircling wing and the head-on confrontation. Choosing the latter approach for themselves, they formed up many ranks deep to guarantee the success of their charge; meanwhile, they deliberately rushed at the leaders of the enemy army to ensure that no encircling wing could be brought to bear against them. In this way, their victories are a perfect example of how Greek tactics developed to meet the particular challenges of Greek battle: the tactical limitations of militia armies, the common battle plans that emerged as a result, and the daunting presence of the Spartans, who always remained one step ahead of everyone else.

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[91] Hanson 1988, 207. To explain the outcome at Leuktra, Hanson puts particular emphasis on the role of the strong fighting spirit of the Theban defenders and the early death of Kleombrotos (205–206).

[92] Lazenby 1989, 71.

## Theory

Thucydides' account of Argive and Spartan tactics at Mantineia shows that by the second half of the fifth century there was an awareness that a certain amount of 'experience' (ἐμπειρία), or, rather, 'skill' (ἐμπειρία, τέχνη) was essential in war. Both commanders and their troops needed to have it. The notion that sheer courage offset such skill is a common theme in Greek writings; it is frequently stressed that a force lacking good order or overwhelmed by the enemy's tactical ability could still fight bravely, and thereby win glory and admiration. But there were recognised limits to the value of courage alone:

> τὸ μὲν γὰρ θάρσος ἀμέλειάν τε καὶ ῥᾳθυμίαν καὶ ἀπείθειαν ἐμβάλλει, ὁ δὲ φόβος προσεκτικωτέρους τε καὶ εὐπειθεστέρους καὶ εὐτακτοτέρους ποιεῖ.
>
> For courage breeds carelessness, laziness, disobedience; fear makes men more attentive, more obedient, more disciplined.
>
> XEN. *Mem.* 3.5.5

Xenophon insisted that just as those who wished to be strong must train their bodies, so those who wished to be good at war must learn the relevant skills (*Mem.* 2.1.28).[93] Much could be achieved by a force that knew what it was doing, and went about it with more than simple valour.[94]

What were the 'skills' that could increase the chances of victory? Classical military treatises rarely discuss the conditions and requirements of pitched battle directly. However, on this subject they are once again full of signs that military theory followed entirely in the footsteps of practice.

This is apparent first of all in the emphasis on organisation and training. Aristotle's famous statement that 'without orderly formation the hoplite body is useless' (*Pol.* 1297b.19–20) is easily understood in light of the realities of Greek battle outlined above, and it should not cause surprise that much of the theoretical work of Xenophon in particular is focused on the importance of formations and detailed officer hierarchies for the proper functioning of armed forces in the field. We have seen how urgently he wished to impress upon his audience that Spartan infantry drill really was not difficult to learn (*Lak. Pol.* 11.5–7). In the *Kyroupaideia* he describes at length what is required to create a strong force of infantry out of untrained men, emphasising that drill in arms should be the one and only activity of the troops (2.1.20–24). He does not limit this kind of advice only to those who would lead infantry; elsewhere we find him arguing that the Athenian cavalry commander, too, should subdivide his horsemen into files with file-leaders and half file-leaders and file-closers, noting that such subdivision will make it easier to pass down orders, to manoeuvre, and to respond to surprise attacks (*Hipparch.* 2.2–9, 4.9). Training for horsemen should be constant as well—'for my part I cannot think of anything that should be worked on more than matters of war' (*Hipparch.* 8.1–7).[95]

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[93] Jouanna 2015, 32–33.

[94] There is much to be said on the tension in Greek military writings between courage and skill as desirable traits in battle. I hope to explore this further in future research.

Yet these were the ideals of the expert, and the fact that Xenophon still had to offer such advice shows that these ideals were far removed from reality. At a more pragmatic level, theoretical works therefore offered the same solution chosen by many Greek armies in practice: the creation of small, flexible units, led by trusted men, which could take the burden of manoeuvre and tactical response off the shoulders of the general levy. When attacking a stronger force, Xenophon says, the cavalry commander must not risk all his troops, because many of the slow and poorly trained ones will be lost in the retreat; rather, he should pick out 'the strongest of his horses and men', who will be able to strike and withdraw quickly (*Hipparch.* 8.12–14). Aineias the Tactician even more faithfully echoes the arguments for the formation of units of picked troops found in historical accounts:

> ἔπειτα λοιπὸν ἀπολέγειν σώματα τὰ δυνησόμενα μάλιστα πονεῖν, καὶ μερίσαντα λοχίσαι, ἵνα εἴς τε τὰς ἐξόδους καὶ τὰς κατὰ πόλιν περιοδίας καὶ τὰς τῶν πονουμένων βοηθείας ἢ εἴς τινα ἄλλην ὁμότροπον ταύταις λειτουργίαν ὑπάρχωσιν οὗτοι προτεταγμένοι τε καὶ δυνατοὶ ὄντες ὑπηρετεῖν.
>
> Next, one must pick out those most capable of physical exertion, and divide them into *lochoi*, so that for sallies, for patrolling the city, for helping those hard pressed, or for any other duty like this, these men are ready and able to serve.
>
> AIN. TAKT. 1.5

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[95] Lengauer 1979, 163, 167.

He goes on to advise that the younger and stronger men should be chosen from the rest for guard duty on the walls. The remaining 'mob' (ὄχλος) is only to be trusted to keep watch in public spaces (1.6–9). Admittedly, Aineias emphasises the political aspect—loyalty to the city's ruling regime—as one of the main criteria for the selection of dependable troops; yet the prominent inclusion of strength and fitness among these criteria reveals purely military considerations as well. As his scenarios for the defence of a city unfold, it is consistently the picked troops who do the hard work—setting ambushes (16.7), guarding prominent magistrates (17.6), checking on sentries with the general at night (26.10), and forming an active reserve when the city is under assault (38.2).

This kind of 'thinking with picked troops' finds its expression in the authors' advice for actual battle. The focus is on tight control of small units, on readiness and rapid response. Aineias stresses the need for all detachments defending a city's territory to be sent out in good order, in mutually supporting groups; they are to remain in communication with each other and with the commander through signal fires, allowing them to work together and force the enemy, caught in unfamiliar ground, to dance to their tune.[96] Xenophon similarly urges the cavalry commander to keep his troops always in formation, to hide his strength from the enemy, and to strike against any detachment or position that seems weak, 'even if it happens to be far away'.[97] It was the duty of the general to 'always be mindful of whatever comes up' (Xen. *Hipparch.* 9.1), and to adjust his plans accordingly. All this beautifully sums up the tactical doctrine of the independently operating reserve forces seen so often in Greek battles.

Only Xenophon actually describes a theoretical battle on a grand scale—yet this fictional account of the battle of Thymbrara (*Kyr.* 6.3.18–34, 7.1) is so relevant to the tactical problems encountered in Greek battles that Anderson went so far as to regard it as a deliberate study of the relative merits of Theban and Spartan battle plans.[98] Kroisos of Lydia, vastly outnumbering his Persian enemies, is made to attempt a double encirclement of their army by marching out his wings in column like the Spartans did on their right at the Nemea. His centre is held by an Egyptian phalanx drawn up a hundred deep. Kyros responds by massing his whole army, including his siege towers and baggage train, behind a front line of chariots and hoplites, and driving the whole vast column straight into the trap. The basic Greek tactical principles of encirclement and direct attack are very much in evidence here, and it seems initially obvious which one will come out on top. Yet, with a relatively small reserve of a thousand infantry and cavalry on each flank, Kyros manages to save the day: he charges into the exposed flanks of the enemy's encircling wings as they advance, routing them and surrounding the deep Egyptian formation in turn.

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[96] Ain. Takt. 15.2–6, 16.7–10, 16.16–22; this is seen in practice at Gela in 405 (Diod. 13.108.7).

[97] Xen. *Hipparch.* 4.1–5.9, 7.8–15; much of his advice echoes Brasidas' speech at Amphipolis (Thuc. 5.9.2–8).

[98] Anderson 1970, 165, 181–191, 211–212, 217–219.

This manoeuvre, of course, is essentially the same as the one that won the battle of Olpai and tipped the scales in favour of the Boiotians at Delion. The main difference is its scale—but even so, it is worth stressing the modest size of the forces Kyros chose to carry out his plan. The vast majority of his forces were ordered simply to move forward. His enemies are shown wheeling their formation (Xen. *Kyr.* 7.1.5, 23–24) and even about-facing in the heat of battle (7.1.37), but his own troops show no such tactical skill. Again, Kyros and his generals clearly *understand* what is going on, but they make no attempt to perform similar manoeuvres. They leave the decisive element of their plan to small detachments controlled by the general himself and his most trusted deputy. In this way, the fictional battle serves as a rejection both of predictable Spartan grand manoeuvres and of easily outwitted Theban brute force. Instead, Xenophon's account harks back to earlier tactical solutions to the problems of leading large, insufficiently professional armies to victory.

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Greek battle tactics developed in response to two interrelated problems: firstly, Greek commanders' severely limited battlefield control over their cumbersome masses of untrained men, and secondly, the sheer effectiveness of the basic deployments outlined in the previous chapter. The Greeks were forced to find ways to mitigate the former problem in order to address the latter. Without some capacity for manoeuvre, the known basic battle plans made up the full range of their armies' options. Yet they rose enthusiastically to the challenge. As early as the Persian Wars, they are seen fielding small units of picked troops which provided their armies with the responsiveness and manoeuvrability large forces lacked; by the end of the fifth century, good cavalry could be trusted to take on this role, while several states appear to have turned their picked hoplite formations into standing units. In battle, these small independent units could act decisively to disrupt an attempted encirclement or stem the tide of a breakthrough. For a while, the Spartans held sway in pitched battle due to their tactical control over the whole of their hoplite line, but it was only a matter of time before others discovered the right combination of careful deployment, combined arms and the use of picked troops to mostly neutralise their advantage. Such tactics were perhaps a poor substitute for the meticulous sweeping manoeuvres of a fully professional force—but they were the most efficient way to turn the amateur militia of a Greek city-state into an army that could hold its own in battle.

## CHAPTER 6

# 'No Shortage of People to Kill': The Rout and Its Aftermath

### Fight or Flight

Despite the efforts of Greek generals to rely as little as possible on the performance of the hoplite militia, most major battles still ultimately hinged on a single clash between rival lines of heavy infantry. The previous chapters have revealed the structural reasons for this. Firstly, to protect the phalanx, restrictive terrain was often chosen for battle; secondly, for the same reason, horsemen and light troops were usually deployed primarily to cancel out their counterparts in the opposing army. Both tendencies set the phalanxes of each army on a collision course. Thirdly, while hoplites were the only troops with the staying power to face down a charge and rout the enemy in hand-to-hand combat, the hoplite body lacked the discipline and manoeuvrability to carry out any battle plan more sophisticated than a head-on assault. As a result, even though the Greeks were fully aware of the amateurism and unreliability of the hoplite levy, they were nonetheless forced to retain the frontal clash of phalanxes as a central feature of battle.

With this tactical reality in mind, it seems strange that many modern accounts of Greek warfare treat the moment of truth, the clash and rout, as a mere instant in the course of a typical battle. They rarely describe this critical event in much detail, and practically never consider its potential as an aspect of military thought.[1] This treatment surely means that our picture of tactical thinking as a response to battlefield realities is incomplete. The encounter of the hoplites, after all, presented commanders with a serious tactical problem. If the outcome of battle was to depend on the sheer perseverance of the hoplites, the willingness of these men to stand together and 'look spears in the face' (Xen. *Sym.* 2.14) became far more important than it had been in the fluid battles of the Archaic period.

The pressure to find ways to increase the reliability of hoplites must have been significant. The untimely crumbling of the line was a mortal threat to any

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[1] See for example Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 144; Connor 1988, 14; Lazenby 1991, 91; Van Wees 2004, 191; Rawlings 2007, 97; Wheeler 2007c, 211–212.

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battle plan; our sources suggest that, once the rout had begun, it was almost impossible to reverse. Given the hoplites' lack of military discipline and the absence of a hierarchy of officers to rally the men, a phalanx that was 'turned' was typically beyond repair. There are only two known exceptions. At Solygeia, both the Athenians and Corinthians managed to regain control over one wing of their phalanx.[2] At the battle of Kynoskephalai in 364, Pelopidas' forces were repulsed three or four times before finally putting their enemies to flight (Plut. *Pel.* 32.2–7). In the former case, however, the double recovery was due to the nature of the terrain: the retreating Corinthians rallied when they reached the safety of a wall on a nearby hill, while the fleeing Athenians were driven straight into the surf and had no choice to but to stand and fight. In the latter case, according to Plutarch, Pelopidas' inspiring leadership and the troops' hatred of their enemy kept the army in the fight—though it is not clear from his account how this actually played out, given the general's limited control over the whole of his army. In all other battles of which we hear, the flight of the phalanx was final.[3] Routed armies did not stop running until they reached their camp or a friendly city wall. Generals who wished to retain some control over the battle had to give serious thought to the ways in which a rout might be prevented.

To make matters worse, the hoplite phalanx was a fickle thing. The importance of group psychology in holding the hoplite body together meant that a sudden panic in the ranks could spread like wildfire, causing the whole formation to collapse.[4] On a number of occasions, significant parts of a hoplite line broke and fled before the two sides even met.[5]

The Greeks appear to have blamed such sudden collapses of the battle line on the gods,[6] but in practice it seems to have been more commonly caused by the Spartans. Admittedly, part of the Spartan Derkylidas' army in Asia Minor once chose to flee rather than fight the Persians (Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.17), and the Spartans' own allies—with the exception of the men of Pellene—appear to have broken almost without a fight at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.20). But in all other examples, the ones running away before coming to blows were opposed by Spartans or Spartan-led troops. At Amphipolis, half of Brasidas' Athenian enemies preferred to scatter rather than face him with their formation in disorder (Thuc. 5.10.8). As noted in the previous chapter, the Argive militia at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.72.4) and Koroneia (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.17) refused to stand its ground against the Spartans, as did the Corinthians at the Long Walls of Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.11). In 368, the forces of the Arkadian League similarly fled before a Spartan army, so that the engagement went down in history as the Tearless Battle (Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.31; Diod. 15.72.3; Plut. *Ag.* 33.3–5). Winning was rarely so easy for other Greeks.

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[2] Thuc. 4.43.2–4 (as noted in Van Wees 2004, 191 n. 35).

[3] There is one further example of fleeing troops rallying and returning to the fight: at Tamynai in 349/8, a certain Kleophanes managed to persuade the fleeing Euboian cavalry to turn back and support the Athenian hoplites (Plut. *Phok.* 13.3).

[4] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 318–319, 328–333; Christ 2006, 100–102.

[5] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 330, 332; Hanson 1989, 102–103; Lazenby 1991, 91; Sabin 2000, 13; Christ 2006, 100; Rawlings 2007, 94; Echeverría 2011, 61.

[6] Eur. *Bakkhai* 303–304; Paus. 10.23.7; Hanson 1989, 103.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Spartans made a uniquely terrifying opponent; their disciplined advance into battle was an unnerving sight to those who relied on battle cries and mad charges to overcome their fear of the fight.[7] The Spartans, however, were aware of the psychological effect they had,[8] and they appear to have done everything in their power to make it worse. They paid careful attention to their personal appearance and to the shine of their shields before battle, both to showcase their indifference to imminent danger and to make the men look more intimidating once they took their place in the line (Hdt. 7.208.2–3, 7.209.3; Plut. *Lyk.* 22.1–3). Xenophon claims it was Lykourgos who told the Spartans to wear red tunics, carry bronze-clad shields, and grow their hair long—all to make them look 'taller, nobler, and more terrifying' (*Lak. Pol.* 11.3).[9] The resulting army was a daunting presence when drawn up for battle, their front 'a solid mass of bronze and red' (Xen. *Ag.* 2.7), rolling on slowly, the men marching to the blaring tune of pipes (Thuc. 5.70). Xenophon stresses elsewhere how the Ten Thousand, decked out in red and bronze like Spartans, made an equally dreadful sight (*An.* 1.2.16–18)—and at Kounaxa they, too, routed their enemies without shedding a drop of blood (*An.* 1.8.19, 1.10.11, 1.10.13).[10]

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[7] Kromayer/Veith 1903, 332; Krentz 1985b, 60; Hanson 1989, 100, 149; Tuplin 2013, 223. Note the evocative scene sketched by Xenophon (*Kyr.* 3.3.57–63), which seems to draw on his account of the Tearless Battle (*Hell.* 7.1.31).

[8] Plut. *Lyk.* 22.3; Xenophon (*Oik.* 8.6) stresses the imposing spectacle of an army marching in good order.

[9] The Spartan uniform was probably meant primarily to prevent ostentatious display in dress and armour, enforcing the outward homogeneity of the Spartiate 'equals' (Van Wees 2004, 54). However, in light of Xenophon's testimony, we should not suppose that its military advantages were merely an accidental side effect, and the Spartans' choice for these particular colours is surely no coincidence.

[10] Although both Wylie (1992b, 129–130) and Ehrhardt (1994, 1–2) have argued that the Persians deliberately refused to engage the Greeks, since they only had to dispatch Kyros to win.

The Spartans, then, deliberately used a number of scare tactics in order to intimidate their opponents into giving up; their good order, their disciplined movement, the polished gleam of their bronze weaponry, and the fierce individual appearance of the men all contributed to an image of undaunted and unbreakable fighting power. No wonder that we hear of other Greeks dreading the thought of facing Spartans in battle.[11] This fear was as much their weapon as the training that largely inspired it; as Plutarch notes (*Pel.* 17.6), their reputation for invincibility soon became a self-fulfilling prophecy.[12]

Despite Xenophon’s pleading, other Greeks would not adopt Spartan dress or Spartan drill, and therefore could not replicate the effect. Perhaps the appearance of uniform shield blazons during the Classical period[13] betrays efforts on the part of some city-states to make their hoplite militia look more intimidating as well as more recognisable, but for the most part the offensive use of fear in pitched battle remained a Spartan prerogative. Other armies were limited to features of battle that served as much to frighten the enemy as to keep the nerves of their own men in check: the paean, the war cry and the headlong charge. The effect of these was largely cancelled out by the enemy doing the exact same things. It was only through the use of surprise, or through tactics like a deep deployment or the maintenance of a mobile reserve, that Greek armies could exert psychological pressure. If Diodoros (15.32.5–6) is right to credit Chabrias with forcing Agesilaos to withdraw simply by standing firm against the Spartan king’s advance, this encounter—during the campaign of 378—is the first and only known attempt to use something like the Spartans’ own intimidation methods against them.[14] Chabrias’ force, however, consisted of mercenaries, supported by the *epilektoi* of the Sacred Band. Ordinary hoplites did not share the level of discipline of such troops.

Instead, they focused their efforts on the other side of the coin: defence against sudden panic. It was well known that such panics could break out without provocation in beleaguered cities and army camps, especially at night;[15] Aineias the Tactician devotes nearly an entire chapter to listing countermeasures (27.1–14).[16] Most of these measures relied on the imposition of order and routine—for instance, commanding affected troops to shout a predetermined watchword—to calm the men down and nip the crisis in the bud. It was not so easy to manage the situation if panic were to break out among hoplites drawn up for battle. The threat was obviously far more real, and a commander's attempts to convince his troops that their fear was groundless were likely to fall on deaf ears. How could a premature flight nonetheless be prevented?

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[11] Thuc. 4.34.1; Lysias 16.15–17; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.18, 4.4.16; Plut. *Pel.* 17.6. The anecdote of Pasimachos’ stand at the Long Walls of Corinth (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10) shows the same phenomenon, but by inversion: Spartans carrying Sikyonian shields appear less frightening to their enemies than they rightly should be.

[12] Lazenby 1991, 104–105. The point that the Spartans used terror as a battle tactic was recently made by Millender (2016, 189–190). For a more detailed version of the argument presented here, see Konijnendijk 2017.

[13] Anderson 1970, 18–20; Wheeler 1991, 140; Van Wees 2004, 54.

[14] See also Nepos 12.1; Polyain. *Strat.* 2.1.2. Xenophon does not report this event. The exact nature of Chabrias’ ploy has long been controversial: see for example Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 170; Parke 1933, 77; Anderson 1963; Munn 1987, 118–119; Matthew 2012, 217–219.

This crucial question provides the context for the importance of courage in the Greek view of what was needed for victory. Morale-boosting customs such as the pre-battle speech must have been valued at least in part due to the looming threat of a fatal collapse of fighting spirit; a reminder of the cause and the stakes might increase the hoplites' willingness to endure the horrors of close combat. Without officers to manage troop morale at the smaller unit level, the phalanx relied on the mutual encouragements of its individual members to keep spirits high:

> ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ὁ παιὰν ἐγένετο, ἅμα πορευόμενοι οἱ ὁμότιμοι φαιδροὶ πεπαιδευμένοι καὶ παρορῶντες εἰς ἀλλήλους, ὀνομάζοντες παραστάτας, ἐπιστάτας, λέγοντες πολὺ τὸ ἄγετ᾽ ἄνδρες φίλοι, ἄγετ᾽ ἄνδρες ἀγαθοί, παρεκάλουν ἀλλήλους ἕπεσθαι. οἱ δ᾽ ὄπισθεν αὐτῶν ἀκούσαντες ἀντιπαρεκελεύοντο τοῖς πρώτοις ἡγεῖσθαι ἐρρωμένως. ἦν δὲ μεστὸν τὸ στράτευμα τῷ Κύρῳ προθυμίας, φιλοτιμίας, ῥώμης, θάρρους, παρακελευσμοῦ, σωφροσύνης, πειθοῦς …
>
> When the paean was over, the Equals marched forward, beaming, moving expertly, checking on one another, calling those beside and behind them by name, repeating, "come on, friends," "come on, brave men," encouraging each other to advance. And those behind, hearing them, in turn called on the men in front to lead on with gusto. In this way Kyros' army was filled with enthusiasm, ambition, strength, courage, cheering, self-control, obedience …
>
> XEN. *Kyr.* 3.3.59[17]

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[15] Thuc. 4.125.1, 7.80.3; note Plutarch's claim (*Mor.* 192c) that the Theban army never suffered a single panic while Epameinondas was its general—apparently a remarkable achievement.

[16] This is apparently only a summary of the detailed treatment of the subject in his lost book on military preparations, to which he refers the reader at 21.2.

[17] This account is, of course, fictional, but it shows what we may assume was Greek practice

Such practices offered no guarantees. Encouraged in broadly similar ways, some militia contingents fought to the death while others fled before a blow was struck. Legislation existed in several city-states to serve as a deterrent against fleeing from battle,[18] but it was of little help in preventing mass rout, because in such cases, for pragmatic and political reasons, the rules were never enforced.[19]

A more substantive tool was available to keep a battle line in the fight. Already in Homer we find evidence that the Greeks understood the value of having especially brave men stationed at the rear of a battle line; they could help to drive the others forward, and their presence would block any attempts by the men in front to run away.[20] While this concept apparently went back to the days before the rise of the phalanx, it was easily adapted to a new reality of regular formations. In a grid pattern of ranks and files, a steadfast and encouraging rear rank could be obtained simply by insisting that the last man in each file should be the ‘oldest and most sensible’ (Xen. *Hipparch.* 2.3). Xenophon implicitly or explicitly recommends this approach for both hoplites and horsemen (*Hipparch.* 2.3–5; *Kyr.* 7.5.4–5; *Mem.* 3.1.8). In his view, the presence of reliable men at the rear was vital to the performance of a battle line:

> … φάλαγγος οὔτ᾽ ἄνευ τῶν πρώτων οὔτ᾽ ἄνευ τῶν τελευταίων, εἰ μὴ ἀγαθοὶ ἔσονται, ὄφελος οὐδέν.
>
> … unless its first and its last are brave men, the phalanx is good for nothing.
>
> XEN. *Kyr.* 6.3.25

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in more detail than any historical account. For various specific points see Hanson 1989, 100; Wheeler 1991, 144–147; Krentz 1994, 45; Parker 2004, 141–143; Hunt 2007, 132; Crowley 2012, 109–126.

[18] Best attested at Athens (Lysias 14.6, 14.14–15; Aischines 3.175; Balot 2014, 219–220) and Sparta (Van Wees 2004, 111–112; Ducat 2006, 29–30; Humble 2006, 224; Millender 2016, 177–180).

[19] This applied both at Athens (Hamel 1998, 59–63; Christ 2006, 105, 116–121, 141; Hunt 2007, 131–132) and at Sparta (Thuc. 5.34.2; Plut. *Ag.* 30.2–4; Ducat 2006, 32–33, 47; Chrissanthos 2013, 315).

[20] Hom. *Il.* 4.297–300. This is not quite the same principle as that of the deep phalanx; the strength of such formations derived from the power of depth (that is, numbers) to encourage the front ranks and frighten the enemy. The principle seen here is that of selecting the men at the rear for their *quality*.

This assessment shows that the deployment of such troops was specifically intended as a tactical response to the unpredictable behaviour of massed formations. Many modern scholars have noted the potential role of the rear-rank men in the prevention of panic flight.[21]

By the final years of the fifth century, it seems some Greeks were trying to put this concept on a more formal footing. Xenophon is the first and only Classical author to mention *ouragoi*, literally 'rear-leaders'—men specially chosen to stand at the back of a unit of heavy infantry and hold the formation together (*An.* 4.3.26, 29; *Kyr.* 2.3.22, 3.3.40). The appearance of a proper title for these men is significant. In Xenophon's view of unit deployment, the *ouragoi* were not an informally established rear rank of reliable men, but an appointed group with recognised responsibilities. While his description of their role in guiding formation evolutions (*An.* 4.3.26) connects them to the sub-units of the phalanx without revealing exactly how many there were, he makes it clear in his account of Kyros' fictional army that there was only one for each *lochos* of twenty men (*Kyr.* 2.3.22). The parallel unit in the organisation of the Ten Thousand was the *enomotia* (*An.* 3.4.21, 4.3.26). If we assume that the concept found in the *Kyroupaideia* was inspired by the practice of the Ten Thousand, it would mean that the *ouragoi* were not simply file-closers; the units to which they were attached could be deployed as many as four (*Kyr.* 2.3.21) or six files wide (*Lak. Pol.* 11.4). Rather, they were subordinate officers, stationed either on the other end of the unit as the commander, or behind the formation as supernumeraries.[22] As such, they represent an entirely new concept in the deployment of hoplites. Xenophon explains, however, that they were selected on the very same criteria—courage, age and good sense—as the rear-rank men who had no official title, and that their primary function was the same, to encourage the men in front of them and prevent them from running away (*Kyr.* 3.3.41, 6.3.27). The introduction of the term and the new officer's possible placement behind the line reveal an attempt to institutionalise a tried and tested remedy for a recurrent problem.

Both the deployment of reliable rear-rank men and the appointment of *ouragoi* seem attractive options for a hoplite force. They were legitimised by a Homeric connection, and they required no additional discipline or drill. They provided a partial solution to a pertinent tactical problem that seems perfectly tailored to the capabilities of Greek militia armies. Indeed, scholars describing these features of Greek tactical thought tend to take it for granted that both practices were widespread.[23] Yet we do not actually hear of any phalanx explicitly organised in this way. The notion of a rear rank of brave and encouraging older warriors occurs only in Xenophon, and when he proposes this idea to the Athenian cavalry, he stresses that it is only his *opinion* that this should be done (*Hipparch.* 2.2). He claims that the *hoplomachos* Dionysodoros taught the basic principle, but failed to elucidate how it could be applied to a body of men (*Mem.* 3.1.5–10). As in the case of several other tactical concepts Xenophon endorses at length, it makes no sense to assume that it was already common; rather, we should assume that he was trying to *make* it common. The same applies to the *ouragoi*, whose role is explained only in the context of Kyros' idealised fictional army. Only once, during the retreat of the Ten Thousand, do *ouragoi* appear in a historical context (Xen. *An.* 4.3.26, 29). They make no appearance even in Xenophon's description of Spartan infantry organisation. They seem to have become a standard feature of warfare only in the Hellenistic period.[24]

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[21] Krentz 1985b, 60–61; Hanson 1989, 104; Goldsworthy 1997, 12–13; Schwartz 2009, 172; Crowley 2012, 57; Millender 2016, 166.

[22] *Contra* Wheeler 2007c, 207. The confusion about their nature likely derives from Asklepiodotos, who refers both to the last rank of a phalanx *and* to one set of rearguard officers as *ouragoi* (2.2–3, 2.9). However, for light infantry and cavalry, the *ouragos* is always an officer stationed behind the formation (Askl. 6.3, 7.2). Polybios (6.24.2, 25.1, 35.6, 37.5) uses the term to indicate the Roman *optio*, who was a supernumerary.

How do we explain the fact that these ideas were apparently rarely if ever brought into practice? There may be a clue in the advice Xenophon puts in the mouth of Sokrates: in order to arrange a formation with good men at the front and back, and bad men in the middle, one has to be able to separate the two (*Mem.* 3.1.9).[25] Would the members of the hoplite militia have welcomed the vetting process? It was one thing to select from the hoplite body a small number to form a unit of picked troops, but quite another to divide the entire formation into 'good' and 'bad' men. Some informal sorting may well have been one of the responsibilities of the *lochagos* or the *taxiarchos* tasked with drawing up a hoplite unit,[26] but the selection could not have been made too rigorous or explicit without causing friction among citizens who regarded competitive courage as the highest good.[27] Those assigned to the middle would suffer a blow to their ego and morale. Those placed in the rear ranks might complain that they were denied a chance to display their valour at the front.[28] Even in the well-disciplined army of his ideal monarchic ruler, Xenophon anticipates the possible indignation of those placed at the rear; Kyros impressed upon his *ouragoi* that their position was 'not at all less honourable' than that of the front-rank men (*Kyr*. 3.3.41–42).

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[23] See the works cited in n. 21 above.

[24] Askl. 2.2–3, 2.9, 6.3, 7.2; Aelian *Takt.* 5.1; Arr. *Takt.* 5.4.

[25] Xenophon describes the process of 'weeding out' the bad men from a phalanx at *Kyr.* 2.2.23–27.

[26] Although Van Wees (2004, 186) doubts whether they would have had either the knowledge or the authority to do so.

[27] Lendon 2005, 45–57. Indeed, Plato's remark that a man might find his own station in a

Given that Greek militias never seem to have elaborated their officer hierarchies below the level of the *lochagos*, we may assume that there would also have been little enthusiasm for the appointment of *ouragoi*. After all, these men would form yet another group of superiors within an army of ideological equals in perpetual competition for honour. Unlike the generals, the *ouragoi* could not prove their worthiness to lead by giving the right example in battle; on what basis, then, should they have coercive power over the men who fought? Their authority was contrary to all that the hoplite militia stood for. Unsurprisingly, Aristotle dismisses the practice of forcing troops forward from the rear, arguing that it would not make the men really brave, but only afraid of punishment (*Nik. Eth*. 1116a.30–35).[29] These moral objections explain why the veteran mercenaries of the Ten Thousand provide the only evidence of *ouragoi* in action. Again, the values of the citizen hoplite blocked potential ways to improve his cohesion and performance in battle.

In the end, commanders could do little more than try to cause panic among their enemies before it took hold of their own men.[30] They had to negotiate the twin priorities of terrifying the enemy and protecting their own line against sudden shocks. In this sense, the hoplite's disdain for weapons training may be justified to some extent; in a context of massed amateur warriors fighting battles that hinged entirely on morale, it really *was* more important for the men to be willing to face the terror of combat than to fight well. However, again, the vulnerability of the hoplite phalanx also propelled tactical innovation.

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battle line (*Apology* 28d) and his account of the hardened pauper stationed beside the fat and clumsy rich man in the phalanx (*Pol*. 556d) suggests that sorting by quality was not typically a part of drawing up a phalanx.

[28] According to Lysias (16.15), Mantitheos had himself deliberately placed in the front rank at the Nemea to prove his courage and commitment to the cause.

[29] The statement fits into a general tendency of Classical Athenian authors to contrast Spartan forced obedience with Athenian 'democratic', voluntary courage. For this aspect of democratic ideology, see Millender 2002; Balot 2010; 2014.

[30] Echeverría (2011, 71–72) has argued that the shock charge of the hoplite phalanx was in itself an attempt to win in an instant and avoid the uncertainties of prolonged hand-to-hand combat.

The raising of picked troops and the aggressive use of cavalry units can be seen as attempts to relieve the pressure on the main body of hoplites. The more a general could rely on specialist units and surprise—both potentially terrifying to the enemy—the less he would need to rely on the endurance of the phalanx itself. Indeed, the Spartans' unique skills and the effect they had in battle may well explain why they were so late in raising their own cavalry and archers, why they never deployed picked units for special tactical missions, and why they focused their efforts instead on the management of the battle line as whole. More than anyone, they *could* rely on their phalanx, and they knew that its very presence did half the work in breaking the enemy. Undoubtedly, part of the shock of Leuktra was that a non-Spartan hoplite force had somehow managed to exert greater psychological pressure than the Spartans themselves.

If both sides retained their cohesion, and no forces could be summoned to interfere with the clash, a fight between rival phalanxes devolved into a battle of will and attrition. Such battles could end with the total destruction of some segments of the line, if particular contingents decided to fight to the death, but they were more generally decided when one of the two phalanxes collapsed and an army was 'turned'.[31] This crumbling of an entire battle line resulted from the cumulative effect of local crises:

> τὸ νικῶν τῶν Ἀθηναίων κέρας, νομίσαν ἄλλο στράτευμα ἐπιέναι, ἐς φόβον καταστῆναι: καὶ ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἤδη, ὑπό τε τοῦ τοιούτου καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Θηβαίων ἐφεπομένων καὶ παραρρηγνύντων, φυγὴ καθειστήκει παντὸς τοῦ στρατοῦ τῶν Ἀθηναίων.
>
> And the victorious wing of the Athenians, thinking another army was bearing down on them, fell into a panic; and then, on both sides, due to this and to their line being broken by the advancing Thebans, the whole Athenian army took to flight.
>
> THUC. 4.96.5–6

> ἐπεὶ μέντοι ἀπέθανε Δείνων τε ὁ πολέμαρχος καὶ Σφοδρίας τῶν περὶ δαμοσίαν καὶ Κλεώνυμος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ οἱ μὲν ἵπποι καὶ οἱ συμφορεῖς τοῦ πολεμάρχου καλούμενοι οἵ τε ἄλλοι ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου ὠθούμενοι ἀνεχώρουν, οἱ δὲ τοῦ εὐωνύμου ὄντες τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ὡς ἑώρων τὸ δεξιὸν ὠθούμενον, ἐνέκλιναν:

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[31] Connor 1988, 14; Van Wees 2004, 191; Rawlings 2007, 97.

> But when Deinon the polemarch and Sphodrias the king's tent companion and Kleonymos his son had been killed, the *hippeis*[32] and those called the aides of the polemarch and the others fell back under the pressure of the mob, while those who were on the left of the Lakedaimonians, when they saw the right wing being pushed back, gave way.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 6.4.14

If such accounts seem unbalanced or facile, it is probably because few of the participants would have had a clear idea of what had happened, and the exact sequence of events eluded even the ancients themselves.[33] At the very least, however, these passages make clear that no single fixed process could account for the collapse of a hoplite formation. The final 'turning' was triggered by a range of factors that varied according to one's place in the line.

The rout of a phalanx—the decisive phase of battle—was therefore not a moment, but a gradual process that was all but impossible to predict or control. It spread from man to man and from contingent to contingent, sometimes starting in several places at once. The irregular nature of this process was undoubtedly part of the reason why hoplites could rarely be rallied; even if the general was still alive at this point, there would have been little opportunity for him to stop a rout spreading through distant parts of the line. At some point, and by an unknown mechanism, the battle was generally understood to have been lost—even if some contingents were able to retreat from the battlefield in good order.[34] At this point, the bloodiest phase of Greek battle began.

## A Divine Gift

For well over a century, scholars of Greek warfare agreed that the Greeks did not pursue their fleeing enemies. It was argued that their way of war did not require such bloody work; once one side was on the run, it was clear who the victors were, and no further violence was needed.[35] The main evidence is that Thucydides tells us it was the Spartan way:

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[32] An old and uncontroversial emendation of the received text, which reads 'ἵπποι' (horses).

[33] Whatley 1964, 120–123; Whitby 2007, 54–55.

[34] For example, the Mantineians at Olpai (Thuc. 3.108.3) and the Spartans at Megara in 409 (*Hell. Oxy.* 1.1).

[35] Rüstow/Köchly 1852, 145; Martin 1887, 429; Droysen 1889, 93–94; Delbrück 1908, 37–38; Kromayer/Veith 1928, 85; Adcock 1957, 7–8, 78–79; Whatley 1964, 122; Detienne 1968, 124;

> ἡ μέντοι φυγὴ καὶ ἀποχώρησις οὐ βίαιος οὐδὲ μακρὰ ἦν: οἱ γὰρ Λακεδαιμόνιοι μέχρι μὲν τοῦ τρέψαι χρονίους τὰς μάχας καὶ βεβαίους τῷ μένειν ποιοῦνται, τρέψαντες δὲ βραχείας καὶ οὐκ ἐπὶ πολὺ τὰς διώξεις.
>
> Yet the flight and retreat were neither violent nor long, for the Lakedaimonians fight long and hard, standing their ground until the turning, but having turned the enemy, they pursue only briefly and not far.
>
> THUC. 5.73.4

Pausanias claims that they had this habit mainly for tactical reasons. Afraid to encounter enemy reserves or rallied troops while they were themselves in disorder from a headlong chase, the Spartans refused to pursue their beaten enemies at all (4.8.11). Reserves were a common feature of Greek battles, and broken armies tended to rally when they reached their camp or a friendly fortification, so the Spartans' concern was not unreasonable. Polyainos ascribed it to the archetypal cunning general, the Athenian Iphikrates (*Strat.* 3.9.2). He gives a different rationale, however, for the Spartan custom not to pursue: it was supposedly introduced by Lykourgos to encourage Sparta's enemies to flee rather than risk their lives in close combat (*Strat.* 1.16.3). Plutarch acknowledges this intention, but his version focuses on yet another explanation—namely, that the Spartans maintained this habit out of the moral conviction that it was wrong to cut down men who had already ceased to resist (*Lyk.* 22.5). However this may be, this apparent aspect of Spartan battle tactics fit well with the beliefs of the Prussians and later scholars regarding the course of Greek battles and the conventions of Greek warfare. It was therefore extended to include all Greeks and canonised as a general rule of war.

Thucydides' statement, however, is part of his account of First Mantineia, which is marked by his repeated emphasis on the ways in which the Spartan approach to battle was unique. Unlike other Greeks, the Spartans had an elaborate officer hierarchy (5.66.3–4), did not see the point of pre-battle speeches (5.69.2), and marched at an even pace, accompanied by music (5.70). Each of these features is carefully explained—a clear sign that Thucydides expected his readers neither to know about them nor to understand their purpose. His comment on the Spartan reluctance to pursue must have highlighted yet another Spartan custom that seemed bizarre to other Greeks. His failure to provide a more detailed explanation may be what prompted later authors like Pausanias,

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Connor 1988, 14; Hanson 1989, 35–36; Mitchell 1996, 94; Runciman 1998, 731; Ober 1999, 56; Hanson 2000, 219; Raaflaub 2015, 92–94.

Polyainos and Plutarch to hazard their own guesses as to why the Spartans, according to such a reputable source, apparently acted in this way.

Normal Greek practice was different. As Krentz noted in a brief section of his seminal article on the supposed rules of Greek warfare, our sources for the Classical period offer many examples of the prolonged pursuit and indiscriminate slaughter of routed enemies.[36] Only once do we hear of moral compunctions about such butchery. According to Xenophon, the Tegeans did not pursue their fleeing opponents in the civil war of 370, because their leader Stasippos 'was the type not to want to kill a lot of his fellow citizens' (*Hell.* 6.5.7). It is clear that this decision fit exclusively within the context of *civil* rather than interstate war—and even there, a massacre could apparently only be prevented by a particularly conscientious commander.[37] In the event, Stasippos' mercy sealed his faction's fate. The defeated faction recovered, obtained help from Mantineia, and had their magnanimous opponent executed (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.8–9).

It is not surprising that Xenophon felt obliged to explain Stasippos' decision. If anything, the pursuit of the losing side seems to be one of the most reliably typical elements of pitched battle. If we consider the list of battles for which a somewhat detailed description survives (Table 7),[38] we find that all but a small minority of them involved the extended pursuit and slaughter of fleeing forces. A few typical cases from the Late Archaic to the Classical period illustrate the point. The Spartans at Samos in 525 pursued the sallying Samians back to the gates, killing many (Hdt. 3.54.2); in 511, the people of Kroton wiped out the invading Sybarites nearly to a man (Diod. 12.10.1). At Megara in 457, the Athenians trapped a large number of fleeing Corinthians in a field surrounded by ditches and stoned them to death (Thuc. 1.106). At Olpai, the Ambrakiots first routed their enemies and pursued them until they reached the safety of their city walls; when the Ambrakiots returned to find that their allies had been defeated, they themselves fled, suffering heavily on their way to the refuge of the nearby town (Thuc. 3.108.2–3). Thrasyboulos fought a battle on Lesbos in

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[36] Krentz 2002, 30–31. Hanson's earlier treatment of the pursuit (1989, 178–184, 200) did not lead him to change his mind about its alleged rarity (see 1989, 35–36; 2000, 219).

[37] Herodotos (1.63.2) tells us that Peisistratos also allowed his enemies to escape after their rout at Pallene; in his case, it was a shrewd show of mercy meant to break their resistance for good.

[38] Again, the list is adapted from the helpful overview found in Schwartz 2009, 235–292. It is by no means a comprehensive collection of battles or of pursuits; the selection is based on the relative extent to which the forces involved, the stages and the outcome of an engagement can be discerned in the sources.

390 of which we know nothing except that 'Therimachos was killed on the spot and many others were killed as they fled' (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.29; Diod. 14.94.4). At Olynthos, when Teleutias' army was thrown into confusion and routed, the Olynthians 'pursued them in every direction and killed a vast number of men' (Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.6). Diodoros tells us that at the Tearless Battle more than ten thousand men were killed in the chase (15.72.3). Often only the fall of night protected the defeated from further harm.[39]

The evidence gathered in Table 7 confirms that it is the *absence* of pursuit that the ancients felt compelled to explain. At First Mantineia, as we have seen, Thucydides ascribes the brief pursuit to yet another peculiar Spartan custom. In his account of Second Mantineia, Xenophon's picture of the total despondence of the Theban army upon hearing of the death of Epameinondas serves primarily to explain why they did not chase the fleeing Spartans (*Hell.* 7.5.25). At Akragas in 406, and again at Tegyra in 375, the commander of the victorious army put an end to the pursuit for fear of the imminent arrival of enemy reinforcements. On only one occasion—at Solygeia—is the lack of a prolonged chase left without explicit justification. However, given that the Corinthians were quickly able to rally on a fortified hill, and that support troops appeared soon after the Athenians set up their trophy (Thuc. 4.44.4–5), it seems likely that we should regard the Athenian reluctance to pursue as a case of tactical prudence similar to that of Pelopidas at Tegyra.

TABLE 7 *Pursuit of fleeing enemies*

| Date | Location | Pursuit | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 490 | Marathon | Persians chased to their ships, which Greeks attempt to burn | Hdt. 6.113.2, 117.1 |
| 479 | Plataia | Persians chased to their camp, which is then assaulted; all but a few thousand occupants killed | Hdt. 9.69.1, 70 |
| 479 | Mykale | Persians chased to their camp, then pursued all through the countryside, betrayed by Milesian guides | Hdt. 9.102.3–106.1 |
| 458 | Megara | Fleeing Corinthians trapped in a field and stoned to death | Thuc. 1.106 |
| 457 | Tanagra | 'Great slaughter' of routed Thessalian cavalry until Spartans come to the rescue | Diod. 11.80.5 |

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[39] Thuc. 4.96.6–8; Xen. *An.* 6.5.31; *Hell.* 1.2.16, 4.3.23, 5.4.45; Diod. 14.82.9; Arr. *An.* 1.2.7.

TABLE 7 *Pursuit of fleeing enemies* (cont.)

| Date | Location | Pursuit | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 457 | Oinophyta | Unknown | Thuc. 1.108.2–3 |
| 432 | Potidaia | Victorious Corinthian wing pursues 'for a considerable distance' before noticing defeat of their allies | Thuc. 1.62.6 |
| 429 | Spartolos | Chalkidian cavalry pursue Athenians 'to a great distance' | Thuc. 2.79.6 |
| 426 | Aigition | Many Athenians overtaken and killed by pursuing light infantry | Thuc. 3.98.2 |
| 426 | Olpai | Victorious Ambrakiots pursue their opponents to nearby Amphilochian Argos; on their return, they are pursued to Olpai with great loss by victorious Akarnanians | Thuc. 3.108.2–3 |
| 426/5 | Idomene | Ambrakiots pursued through difficult terrain and driven into the sea | Thuc. 3.112.5–8 |
| 425 | Sphakteria | Spartans withdraw until cornered, then surrender | Thuc. 4.37.1 |
| 425 | Solygeia | Corinthians withdraw 'without much pursuit' | Thuc. 4.44.2 |
| 424 | Delion | Defeated Athenians pursued until nightfall | Thuc. 4.96.7–8 |
| 423/2 | Laodokeion | Unknown; high losses and battle until nightfall suggest pursuit | Thuc. 4.134.1 |
| 422 | Amphipolis | Defeated Athenians pursued into the hills | Thuc. 5.10.10–12 |
| 418 | Mantineia | Victorious Argive left and centre pursue Skiritai and Brasideioi to baggage train until Spartan right attacks them<br>*Spartans pursue 'only briefly and not far'* | Thuc. 5.72.3<br>*Thuc. 5.73.4* |
| 415 | Syracuse | Athenians pursue 'as far as was safe' | Thuc. 6.70.4 |
| 414 | Syracuse | Unknown | Thuc. 6.97.4 |
| 414 | Syracuse | Athenians, trying to cut off fleeing Syracusans, are counterattacked by cavalry and pursued | Thuc. 6.101.4–6 |
| 413 | Syracuse | Defeated Athenians driven off the cliffs of Epipolai; pursuit in the plain continues into next day | Thuc. 7.44.8 |
| 412 | Miletos | Victorious Athenians pursue Peloponnesians and Persians to foot of city wall | Thuc. 8.25.4 |
| 409 | Ephesos | Defeated Athenian hoplites pursued to the shore | Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.9 |
| 409 | Himera | Himeraians pursue Carthaginians in disorder, killing thousands, until Carthaginians rally and counterattack | Diod. 13.60.5–7 |
| 409 | The Horns (Megara) | Athenians chased and killed 'a vast number' of Megarians | Diod. 13.65.2 |

| Date | Location | Pursuit | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 406 | Akragas | Syracusans 'would have pursued the barbarians all the way to the city', but stop for fear of enemy reinforcements | Diod. 13.87.2 |
| 405 | Gela | Italian and Sicilian Greeks pursue defeated Carthaginians to their camp until Carthaginian reinforcements arrive | Diod. 13.110.2, 6 |
| 403 | Mounichia | Defeated Thirty pursued 'as far as the level ground' | Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.19 |
| 401 | Kounaxa | Victorious Greeks pursue fleeing opponents twice, 'with all their might', to a great distance | Xen. *An.* 1.8.19, 1.10.12 |
| 400 | Bithynia | Defeated Persians and Bithynians pursued until nightfall | Xen. *An.* 6.5.28, 31 |
| 395 | Sardis | Defeated Persians pursued to their camp | Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.24; Diod. 14.80.4 |
| 395 | Haliartos | Defeated Spartans chased into mountains, where they rally, rout pursuing Thebans, and pursue them in turn | Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.19 |
| 395/4 | Naryx | Defeated Phokians pursued until nightfall | Diod. 14.82.9 |
| 394 | Nemea | Detachments of victorious allied right pursue to unknown point; on their return, they are attacked by victorious Spartan right | Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.21–22 |
| 394 | Koroneia | Victorious Thebans pursue Orchomenians to baggage train before noticing defeat of their allies; after second engagement, they are pursued to Mount Helikon | Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.18–19 |
| 392 | Long Walls of Corinth | Victorious Argives pursue Sikyonians to the sea until Spartan contingent appears in their rear; Argives panic, are surrounded and annihilated | Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.10–12 |
| 390 | Lechaion | Defeated Spartans driven into the sea | Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.17 |
| 389 | Eleporos | Dionysios I of Syracuse pursues Italian Greeks across plain | Diod. 14.105.1 |
| 382 | Olynthos | Elimian horsemen kill many Olynthian cavalryand a few infantrymen as they rush back to the city gate | Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.42 |
| 381 | Olynthos | When Peloponnesians flee, Olynthian cavalry 'pursued them in every direction and killed a vast number of men' | Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.6 |
| 375 | Tegyra | 'The pursuit did not go very far' because Thebans fear enemy reinforcements | Plut. Pel. 17.4 |
| 371 | Leuktra | Unknown; Plutarch's 'rout and slaughter of the Spartans' and Xenophon's account suggest pursuit to camp | Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14; Plut. *Pel.* 23.4 |

TABLE 7 *Pursuit of fleeing enemies* (cont.)

| **Date** | **Location** | **Pursuit** | **Source** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 368 | Melea (Tearless Battle) | Spartan cavalry and mercenaries massacre fleeing opponents | Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.31 |
| 365 | Kromnos | Battle ends in truce | Xen. Hell. 7.4.24–25 |
| 364 | Olympia | Defeated Arkadians and Argives pursued into built-up area | Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.31 |
| 364 | Kynoske-phalai | Thessalian cavalry pursue 'a great distance' | Plut. *Pel.* 32.7 |
| 362 | Mantineia | Demoralised by death of Epameinondas, Thebans do not pursue; hamippoi and peltasts pursue but are wiped out | Xen. Hell. 7.5.21–22 |
| 349/8 | Tamynai | Unknown; allied cavalry 'reinforcing the victory of the hoplites' may refer to pursuit | Plut. *Phok.* 13.1–2 |
| 339 | Krimesos | Defeated Carthaginians driven into the river and pursued into nearby hills | Plut. *Tim.* 28.5 |
| 338 | Chaironeia | Unknown; high death toll and many captives suggest pursuit | Diod. 16.86.5–6 |

Since Krentz' remarks on the subject of the chase, several authors have discussed it in greater detail, establishing its ubiquity as an element of Greek battle.[40] It may therefore seem unnecessary to cover the same subject again here. My reason nevertheless to do so at some length is that I believe the arguments of previous scholars have not been pushed as far as they might. Our sources make clear that pursuit was not just common, but actively desired; that the point of pitched battle was not to score a moral victory, but to create an opportunity for slaughter. Inevitably, the Classical Greeks gave thought to how they could make the most of such opportunities. In what follows, I will argue that the pursuit of a fleeing enemy was the very thing the Greeks hoped to achieve when they went into battle, and that various tactical decisions were made in order to maximise the chance of successful pursuit while reducing the risk that the hoplite militia might meet with catastrophic defeat.

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[40] Dayton 2005, 73–76; Schwartz 2009, 214–215; Echeverría 2011, 72–73; Van Wees 2011, 71–76. Note, however, that the point was not adopted by Wheeler, in what should be regarded as the most authoritative current standard work on ancient warfare (2007c, 212).

Even in light of the evidence cited above, such a conclusion may still be considered unwarranted. It could be argued that the abundance of examples demonstrates no more than that the chase was a sadly common reality, and that the Greeks would have regarded it at best as a necessary evil. Yet the sources suggest something different. Xenophon describes the sense of purpose felt by the Spartans when the Argives at the Long Walls of Corinth broke into a panic and fled:

> οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι οὐκ ἠπόρουν τίνα ἀποκτείνοιεν: ἔδωκε γὰρ τότε γε ὁ θεὸς αὐτοῖς ἔργον οἷον οὐδ᾽ ηὔξαντό ποτ᾽ ἄν. τὸ γὰρ ἐγχειρισθῆναι αὐτοῖς πολεμίων πλῆθος πεφοβημένον, ἐκπεπληγμένον, τὰ γυμνὰ παρέχον, ἐπὶ τὸ μάχεσθαι οὐδένα τρεπόμενον, εἰς δὲ τὸ ἀπόλλυσθαι πάντας πάντα ὑπηρετοῦντας, πῶς οὐκ ἄν τις θεῖον ἡγήσαιτο;
>
> The Lakedaimonians had no shortage of people to kill; for then the god granted them an achievement beyond their wildest prayers. To have a crowd of enemies delivered into their hands, terrified, panic-stricken, showing their unshielded sides, none of them caring to put up a fight, but doing everything they could to aid in their own destruction—how could anyone not see it as a divine gift?
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 4.4.12

Far from a moral outrage, Xenophon describes the chase as a glorious opportunity that was eagerly embraced. Here, the Spartans had a chance to engage in the sort of brutal display of military superiority that Van Wees has called 'conspicuous destruction'.[41] Such behaviour was both morally and strategically prudent.[42] The pursuit allowed the victors to wipe out an enemy army rather than just breaking its will to fight—to exact due vengeance and to kill without fear of being killed. Once tactics and combat had broken the enemy, pitched battle turned into the gleeful and systematic destruction of the enemy's ability to carry on the war. Elsewhere, Xenophon makes this point even more clear:

> αἱ μὲν γὰρ πόλεις δήπου ὅταν κρατήσωσι μάχῃ τῶν ἐναντίων, οὐ ῥᾴδιον εἰπεῖν ὅσην μὲν ἡδονὴν ἔχουσιν ἐν τῷ τρέψασθαι τοὺς πολεμίους, ὅσην δ᾽ ἐν τῷ διώκειν, ὅσην δ᾽ ἐν τῷ ἀποκτείνειν τοὺς πολεμίους, ὡς δὲ γαυροῦνται ἐπὶ τῷ ἔργῳ,

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[41] Van Wees 2004, 240; 2010, 250–256; 2011, 105–106.

[42] Schwartz 2009, 214; Van Wees 2011, 74–76.

> ὡς δὲ δόξαν λαμπρὰν ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ὡς δ᾽ εὐφραίνονται τὴν πόλιν νομίζοντες ηὐξηκέναι. ἕκαστος δέ τις προσποιεῖται καὶ τῆς βουλῆς μετεσχηκέναι καὶ πλείστους ἀπεκτονέναι …
>
> For when cities defeat their opponents in battle, words fail to express the joy they feel in the turning of the enemy, in the pursuit, in the killing of the enemy—such pride they feel in the work! Such shining glory they gain, such happiness at the thought of having enhanced their city! Everyone claims that they had a share in the plan, that they killed the most …
>
> XEN. *Hieron* 2.15–16

This killing spree, he makes Hieron say, is one of the ‘pleasures’ (ἡδέα) of being at war.

The fact that pursuit was a practically universal feature of Greek battle shows that Xenophon was not pushing a dissident opinion here. The attitude he describes no doubt resonated as much with the Spartans at the Long Walls of Corinth as it did with any other victorious Greek force. Part of this attitude, of course, was the necessary release of warriors who had faced mortal danger but now saw their enemies on the run; the former threat was rendered helpless, and, as Echeverría put it, ‘fear and fatigue turned into an enthusiastic explosion of joy’.[43] Yet the focus on the *achievement* of slaughter in the passages cited above shows that this release was not the whole story. A second significant motivation was the strategic opportunity presented by the enemy’s moment of vulnerability. The pursuit gave the victors a chance to do real damage to an opponent’s military reputation and resources. Battles where the chase was prevented tended to have a relatively low body count: at Solygeia, where Corinthian reinforcements compelled the victorious Athenians to flee, the defeated lost just two hundred and twelve men (Thuc. 4.44.6), and at Syracuse, with cavalry covering their retreat, the Syracusan dead numbered only two hundred and sixty (6.71.1).[44] By contrast, a long pursuit frequently pushed the death toll into the thousands on the losing side.[45] These numbers explain the anger of the Argives during the overture to First Mantineia, when they realised that their generals had allowed the retreating Spartans to escape 'with no one pursuing them' (οὐδεὶς ἐπιδιώκει, Thuc. 5.56.5). They also explain Xenophon's remark that when Epameinondas fell at Second Mantineia, 'those who were left were unable to *use the victory properly*' (οἱ λοιποὶ οὐδὲ τῇ νίκῃ ὀρθῶς ἔτι ἐδυνάσθησαν χρήσασθαι, Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.25). 'Using the victory' meant chasing and killing at will. Rout without pursuit was lamented as a missed opportunity.

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[43] Echeverría 2011, 72; see also Sabin 2000, 15 (‘their gnawing tension and fear now released and converted into an orgy of blood lust’); Dayton 2005, 76; Rawlings 2007, 97–98; Schwartz 2009, 214.

[44] Krentz (1985a, 18–19) further noted the low losses on both sides at Koroneia (given only in Diod. 14.84.2). However, in this early work, he still followed the Prussian model on the matter of pursuit, denying its frequent occurrence (20).

[45] For instance at Delion (Thuc. 4.101.2) and at the Nemea (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.1; Diod. 14.83.2). At Spartolos (Thuc. 2.79.7), the Athenians lost over 20% of their force ‘and all the generals’.

The need for release and the desire to exploit the enemy's helplessness could go hand in hand. Hoplites are sometimes said to have pursued their enemies over a considerable distance,[46] suggesting they may have done a lot of damage. At Marathon, they chased the Persians all the way back to the beach, allegedly killing them in their thousands and even burning seven of their ships (Hdt. 6.113–115, 117.1). The Spartans seem to have inflicted some of their most famous bloodbaths—at the Nemea and the Long Walls of Corinth—with the very forces that fought the initial clash. Given the chance, hoplites could wipe out their enemies in the process of venting their frustration.

Yet such results were the exception. As many scholars have pointed out, hoplites may have desired to wreak havoc among their fleeing enemies, but they were poorly suited to the task. Their equipment weighed them down, and they would have been too exhausted from the charge and the fight itself to pursue their opponents effectively.[47] In addition, defeated troops could throw away their shields, while the victors had to hold on to them; the resulting chase would have been a lot like the futile attempts of unsupported hoplites to chase off attacking *psiloi*. It is worth pointing out that the Spartans at the Nemea caught their enemies by surprise when they thought the battle was already over; the fight was between a fresh and disciplined Spartan phalanx and a series of confused and tired masses of heavy infantry. At the Long Walls of Corinth, the enemies of the Spartans were panicking and had no means of escape. Only in such conditions could hoplites do their own killing. If the enemy could scatter at will, heavy infantry had little hope of inflicting serious losses.

Indeed, hoplites who pursued too far and lost their cohesion became just as vulnerable as their targets. In the aftermath of the battle of Plataia, the Megarians and Phleiasians ran up in disorder to join the pursuit of the fleeing Persians;

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[46] For instance at Potidaia (Thuc. 1.62.6), at First Mantineia (Thuc. 5.72.3), and at Abydos in 409 (Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.16).

[47] Droysen 1889, 93–94; Grundy 1911, 267–268; Adcock 1957, 7; Anderson 1970, 149; Spence 1993, 157–159; Sabin 2000, 5; Rawlings 2007, 97; Wheeler 2007c, 212.

a detachment of Theban cavalry saw its chance, charged them, and killed six hundred men (Hdt. 9.69.2).[48] During one of the battles outside the walls of Syracuse, the victorious Athenian *logades* were routed mid-pursuit by a cavalry counterattack (Thuc. 6.101.4–5). The Himeraians, at first successful in their battle with the Carthaginians in 409, lost their cohesion during the pursuit and lost three thousand men to an enemy counterattack (Diod. 13.60.6–7). At Haliartos, rallying Spartans turned on their pursuers in the hills, leaving more than two hundred dead (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.20; Plut. *Lys*. 28.6). The enthusiastic pursuit of routed Mantineians by the mercenaries of Polytropos in 370 ended in his death when the Mantineians regrouped and counterattacked (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.13–14). Fighting for their homes against Epameinondas in 362, some Spartans 'pursued further than they should' (ἐδίωξαν πορρωτέρω τοῦ καιροῦ, Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.13); the Thebans swiftly cut them down.[49]

Little could be done to prevent such reverses. Tactical control of pursuing troops seems to have been all but impossible; battles such as Delion, First Mantineia and the Nemea show that victorious contingents usually proved unable to respond to the changing situation on the battlefield.[50] Spread out and unguided, they became liable to panic and fragmentation. Pausanias is probably right to claim that the Spartan reluctance to pursue over great distances was ultimately rooted in their fear of being caught in such a state.[51] As noted above, the Syracusans broke off their pursuit of the Carthaginians at Akragas in 406 because they feared that the enemy might appear with reinforcements (Diod. 13.87.2); the Thebans limited their pursuit of the defeated Spartans at Tegyra for the same reason (Plut. *Pel.* 17.4). However, the inevtiable downside of such necessary caution was the loss of an opportunity for slaughter. At Kounaxa we see the principle in action: the pursuing Greeks shouted to each other not to run out and break formation, and as a result their pursuit was wholly ineffective

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[48] Grundy (1901, 507) suggested that the men from the Greek centre were not in fact joining the pursuit of an already beaten enemy, but rushing forward to support the Athenians in their ongoing fight against the Medising Greeks; for this theory, see also Burn 1970, 537; Green 1970, 267–268; Nyland 1992, 84.

[49] Wheeler (1991, 149) has noted the number of commanders who were wounded or killed as they led the pursuit of their defeated enemies.

[50] Thuc. 4.96.5, 5.73.3; Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.22; see Lazenby 1989, 70–71; Anderson 1970, 148–149; Ehrhardt 1994, 1–2; Van Wees 2004, 191. The battles of Marathon (Hdt. 6.113.2) and Kynoskephalai (Plut. *Pel.* 32.3) are unique in that they apparently involved pursuing troops being reined in and redirected.

[51] Krentz 2002, 30; Dayton 2005, 71–73; Echeverría 2011, 73; Van Wees 2011, 71–72; Toalster 2011, 50, 52; Sheldon 2012, 109.

(Xen. *An.* 1.8.19). It was only at the initial collapse and 'turn' that the hoplites had a real chance to kill large numbers of the enemy; to continue beyond that point was neither effective nor safe.

The Greeks, therefore, used other troops. As we have seen, when the phalanx became a homogenous formation and took on the role of the 'chest and cuirass' of the army, light infantry and horsemen became crucial in screening the heavy infantry and protecting it against their opposing numbers in the enemy force. This explains the emergence of increasingly organised units of such troops from the early fifth century onwards. Yet this shift in army organisation also meant that, for the first time, relative speed became a decisive factor in the tactical roles of different types of troops. Hoplites, while superior in close combat, were slow and vulnerable both on the march and on the run. As a result, the chase became yet another aspect of battle in which more mobile troops proved to be of tremendous tactical value.[52]

Light-armed infantry had no trouble overtaking hoplites in flight. If the advance of the phalanxes had forced the *psiloi* to withdraw to the flanks and rear of the army, we may assume they now rushed forward again to fall upon the routed enemy.[53] Thucydides tells us how well suited they were for this:

> οἱ δὲ Αἰτωλοὶ ἐσακοντίζοντες πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ τροπῇ κατὰ πόδας αἱροῦντες ἄνθρωποι ποδώκεις καὶ ψιλοὶ διέφθειρον …
>
> The swift-footed and light-armed Aitolians used their javelins against many of the men they overtook in the turning, and destroyed them …
>
> THUC. 3.98.2

In one notable case, the losses inflicted by pursuing *psiloi* were so high that Thucydides refused to record them, claiming he would not be believed if he did.[54] The missiles of these troops were especially useful against a cornered enemy, as at the battle near Megara mentioned above; in addition, of course, light troops could simply outrun fleeing hoplites and cut them down with any weapon they had to hand. They appear at times to have done so with reckless abandon. The peltasts and *hamippoi* of the Thebans at Second Mantineia ended up far ahead of the rest of their army, where they were caught and destroyed by enemy forces that turned out not to be fleeing after all (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.25).

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[52] Hanson (1989, 184) presents this as a rare opportunity for light troops and cavalry to prove their worth to 'their betters', the hoplites.

[53] The process is never described, but light troops often explicitly take part in the pursuit: see for example Thuc. 1.106, 5.10.10; Xen. *An.* 4.8.18; *Hell.* 5.3.6; Plut. *Tim.* 28.5; note also Lippelt 1910, 59.

[54] Thuc. 3.113.7; at 3.112.6 he specifies that this was because they were *psiloi* fighting hoplites.

Yet the real killers, again, were the horsemen. Their speed and manoeuvrability made them the perfect troops for pursuit. During campaigns, cavalry could compel unsupported hoplite armies to huddle together in fear of being picked off; during the chase, they could ride down an already scattered phalanx with impunity. Ancient authors frequently single them out for their particular lethality:

> Βοιωτοὶ δὲ ἐφεπόμενοι ἔκτεινον, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ ἱππῆς οἵ τε αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ Λοκροὶ βεβοηθηκότες ἄρτι τῆς τροπῆς γιγνομένης:
>
> The Boiotians hunted and killed them, the cavalry most of all, which included them and the Lokrians, who had come to help at the exact time of the turning.
>
> THUC. 4.96.8[55]

> ἐπεὶ μέντοι ἡγεῖτο ὁ Ἀρχίδαμος, ὀλίγοι μὲν τῶν πολεμίων δεξάμενοι εἰς δόρυ αὐτοὺς ἀπέθανον: οἱ δ᾽ ἄλλοι φεύγοντες ἔπιπτον, πολλοὶ μὲν ὑπὸ ἱππέων, πολλοὶ δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν Κελτῶν.
>
> And when Archidamos led on, only a few of the enemy awaited the spears and were killed; the others were cut down as they fled, many by the horsemen and many by the Celts.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 7.1.31[56]

> … οἵ τε ἱππεῖς προσελάσαντες ὅλην ἐτρέψαντο τὴν φάλαγγα καὶ διώξαντες ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἐνέπλησαν νεκρῶν τὴν χώραν, πλέον ἢ τρισχιλίους καταβαλόντες.
>
> … and the cavalry, charging up, turned the entire phalanx, and pursued them a long way, filling the country with corpses, cutting down more than three thousand of them.
>
> PLUT. *Pel.* 32.7[57]

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[55] See also Thuc. 2.79.6, 6.68.3.

[56] See also Xen. *Hell.* 5.3.6, 5.4.54, 7.2.14.

[57] See also Plut. *Tim.* 31.2–4.

The division of labour is clear. While the hoplites may have done the initial damage, the horsemen had the range and stamina to take the pursuit as far as it could go. In addition, they had the advantage of being fast enough to catch up with fleeing enemy light troops, and even with other cavalry—a unique ability that often made them the most celebrated participants of a successful chase.[58] Xenophon notes that effective pursuit is all but impossible without horsemen:

> … καὶ δὴ τρεπόμενοι ποίους ἢ ἱππέας ἢ τοξότας ἢ πελταστὰς ἄνευ ἵππων ὄντες δυναίμεθ᾽ ἂν φεύγοντας ἢ λαβεῖν ἢ κατακανεῖν; τίνες δ᾽ ἂν φοβοῖντο ἡμᾶς προσιόντες κακοῦν ἢ τοξόται ἢ ἀκοντισταὶ ἢ ἱππεῖς, εὖ εἰδότες ὅτι οὐδεὶς αὐτοῖς κίνδυνος ὑφ᾽ ἡμῶν κακόν τι παθεῖν μᾶλλον ἢ ὑπὸ τῶν πεφυκότων δένδρων;
>
> … and when we have turned them, how could we, without horses, catch or kill fleeing horsemen or archers or peltasts? And what archers or javelin throwers or horsemen would be afraid to come up and harm us, knowing full well that they are in no more danger of being harmed by us than by those trees growing over there?
>
> XEN. *Kyr.* 4.3.5

Cavalry ensured that the chase was more than a clumsy and risky release of stress for embattled hoplites. They could turn the enemy’s rout into the destruction of his army.

Their frequent appearance in this stage of battle confirms the impression we get from Xenophon that the pursuit was a central aspect of Greek tactical thought. If the Greeks regarded the chase as no more than the regrettable result of victorious hoplites’ stress-induced bloodlust, it would be difficult to explain why they would allow *additional* forces to take part in it. Light troops and cavalry rarely had a share in the ‘turning’ when two phalanxes faced off, so why would they have a role to play in the chase? Indeed, why do we hear of them being specifically sent into action only at this point (*Hell. Oxy*. 11.5)? And why would the Greeks praise them specifically and repeatedly for their effectiveness in this role?

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[58] Xen. *An.* 3.4.4–5, 6.5.28; *Hell.* 4.3.6–8, 5.3.2. Note, however, the battle of Sardis according to *Hell. Oxy*. 11.6. The value of this account is disputed (see Wylie 1992a), but regardless of its veracity it makes the plausible suggestion that lightly equipped horse archers would be able to escape mounted pursuers in much the same way that *psiloi* would be able to outrun hoplites in the chase.

The answer must be that the slaughter of the enemy was the desired outcome of battle. The pursuit may have been primarily a matter of inflicting righteous punishment, but this ostentatious display of vengeful power had obvious military advantages. It was more than a mere symbolic act. Conspicuous destruction worked by discouraging enemy action in the future, but also by crushing any remaining potential for such action in the present.[59] The deliberate use of light troops and cavalry in the pursuit demonstrates that this *strategic* aspect of the chase—its potential to cripple the enemy war effort and deter further aggression—was of primary importance in Greek thinking about the purpose of battle.

There were only two ways to survive the onslaught. The first was, quite simply, to stay calm and keep one's head, 'for generally those who behave this way in war will not be touched' (Pl. *Sym.* 221b). Several sources recount the story of Sokrates' heroic behaviour during the Athenian flight at Delion: with his calm demeanour and confident stride he kept all pursuers at bay, saving both his own life and the lives of those around him (Pl. *Laches* 181b; *Sym.* 220e–221c; Plut. *Mor.* 581d–e). Indeed, troops chasing fleeing enemies are likely to have focused on opportune targets, and units that retreated in some semblance of order seem to have suffered far less than those that collapsed completely.[60] This fact probably explains Xenophon's belief that the Spartan ideal of fighting to the death actually saved lives (*Kyr.* 3.3.45; *Lak. Pol.* 9.1–2). Yet in the absence of officers to enforce unit discipline, keeping order required an almost superhuman effort of self-control on the part of individual hoplites. The ancients' admiration for Sokrates shows how exceptional his behaviour was. Flight was primarily a matter of instinctive self-preservation, and to most men this would have meant getting as far away from the enemy as possible before anyone got a chance to strike them down.

The second countermeasure was more reliable: using horsemen as a covering force.[61] Such troops could make pursuers think twice about rushing after their enemies and exposing themselves to counterattack. Their presence could save entire armies:

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[59] Van Wees 2011, 74–76.

[60] At Megara in 409, the Athenians are explicitly said to have left the retreating Spartans alone, and to have gone after the men of Megara who were fleeing in disorder (*Hell. Oxy.* 1.1). Diodoros (13.65.2), however, claims this was only because the Athenians wanted revenge for the recent recapture of Nisaia.

[61] Spence 1993, 159–162; Van Wees 2004, 196; Rawlings 2007, 97–98.

> καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ μὲν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι (οἱ γὰρ ἱππῆς τῶν Συρακοσίων πολλοὶ ὄντες καὶ ἀήσσητοι εἶργον, καὶ ἐσβαλόντες ἐς τοὺς ὁπλίτας αὐτῶν, εἴ τινας προδιώκοντας ἴδοιεν, ἀνέστελλον) …
>
> The Athenians did not pursue far, for the Syracusan cavalry were many and undefeated, and they hemmed them in, attacking and pushing back any of the hoplites they saw pursuing ahead of the rest …
>
> THUC. 6.70.3

At First Mantineia, the Athenian contingent nearly ended up surrounded and destroyed, but their cavalry ensured that they got away safely (Thuc. 5.73.1). At Orchomenos in 370, when Polytropos fell and his troops scattered, ‘very many of the fleeing men would have been killed’, if allied Phleiasian cavalry had not appeared in the nick of time to save them (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.14). By contrast, when Dionysios withdrew the horsemen supporting his unruly mercenary infantry at Syracuse in 396, their removal was intended as a death sentence; the Carthaginians obliged him by wiping out the infantry to a man (Diod. 14.72.2–3).

Cavalry, then, had a dual role in the final phase of battle that made their presence critically important even if they had played no part in the fighting up to that point. No one expresses their importance more clearly than Xenophon, when he has Klearchos address the Ten Thousand after Kounaxa:

> οὐ μὲν δὴ ἂν μάχεσθαί γε δέῃ, ἱππεῖς εἰσιν ἡμῖν ξύμμαχοι, τῶν δὲ πολεμίων ἱππεῖς εἰσιν οἱ πλεῖστοι καὶ πλείστου ἄξιοι: ὥστε νικῶντες μὲν τίνα ἂν ἀποκτείναιμεν; ἡττωμένων δὲ οὐδένα οἷόν τε σωθῆναι.
>
> And if we need to fight, we have no horsemen to help us, while the enemy’s horsemen are very many and very skilled. So, if we win, whom could we kill? And if we lose, not one of us can be saved.
>
> XEN. *An.* 2.4.6

The focus here is entirely on the role of cavalry in the chase. The enemy has horsemen and the Greeks do not; therefore, for the Greeks, winning battles is pointless, and losing is fatal. Conversely, if the enemy are defeated, they will safely escape; if they win, their victory will be total. The examples cited throughout this section show that these are no empty words. Xenophon later repeats the same point in a summation of the hopelessness of the plight of the Ten Thousand (*An.* 3.1.2), and then shows how it was confirmed in practice: the mercenaries failed to ward off a constant barrage of missiles because Persian horsemen made it impossible for them to stray too far from the phalanx (3.3.8–10). Without cavalry to support them, they were harried relentlessly by their more nimble enemies. It was not until they raised their own unit of cavalry that they were able to strike back against the Persians harassing them (3.3.20, 3.4.4–5).[62]

When the Ten Thousand encountered a Persian army in Bithynia, the truth of Klearchos' words was demonstrated again. During the battle, the advance of the veteran phalanx swiftly routed the enemy, but the Greek cavalry corps was too small to be everywhere at once. On the right wing, where they were stationed, they 'killed as many as they could', but on the left wing the unsupported Greek peltasts achieved nothing in the chase because they knew enemy cavalry was waiting for them (Xen. *An.* 6.5.27–29). The looming threat of a cavalry counterattack meant that the Greek left wing had not really won the battle at all; they could not risk abandoning their formation in order to destroy the enemy. The hoplites and light troops stationed there finally decided that they had no choice but to charge the Persian and Bithynian cavalry in the desperate hope of driving them off. When they attacked, however, to their surprise, the enemy promptly fled—'as if they were being chased by horsemen' (ὥσπερ ὑπὸ ἱππέων διωκόμενοι, Xen. *An.* 6.5.31).[63]

Klearchos' speech tells us much about the prominence of cavalry in Greek warfare. However, it tells us even more about the importance of the chase in Greek conceptions of battle. Apparently only an army with troops fit for pursuit could hope to win a victory that would actually count. In principle, cavalry is not essential to this aim; as long as neither side had any horsemen, light infantry could play the same role.[64] The crucial point is that the relative speed of different unit types became a defining feature of tactical thought specifically because it indicated the chances of successful pursuit. An enemy who was routed but not pursued could simply regroup and fight another day. By the same token, armies without adequate units to cover their retreat could fully expect to be wiped out if the enemy ever put them to flight. Both the greatest chance for collective glory and the greatest danger of annihilation appeared *after* the clash of the hoplite lines. The events of the Sicilian Expedition illustrate the point: the Athenians won a string of nominal victories outside the walls of Syracuse, but the Syracusan cavalry made it impossible for them to chase and destroy the enemy army. As a result, the battles they won were not decisive, and they could not win the war.[65] This was precisely the situation Klearchos feared as commander of the Ten Thousand: one in which hard fighting brought no results, and victory meant nothing. If there could be no chase, the battle itself might as well not have been fought in the first place.

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[62] At another point in the narrative (*An.* 3.2.18–19) Xenophon appears to dismiss the Persian horse as useless, but his speech—like Brasidas' comments on Illyrian light-armed troops, discussed in Chapter 4 above—was clearly no more than misleading rhetoric meant to restore the confidence of the troops. Like the words of Brasidas, it only confirms that the troop type being mocked really was perceived as a threat. For this interpretation see Worley 1994, 124; Lendle 1995, 160; Sidnell 2006, 23; Crowley 2012, 101.

[63] This remark seems to have puzzled the Loeb translator, who added a confused note about terrain types. In fact Xenophon's meaning seems perfectly clear: the Persians, who knew their escape would be difficult due to the presence of a gorge to their rear, surprised the Greeks by fleeing as if they were in genuine danger of being caught—which they were not, because the Greeks had no horsemen on that wing.

[64] Note for example the successful joint action of peltasts and hoplites to rescue ravaging light troops at Pygela in 409 (Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.2–3). The main weakness of *psiloi* was that they were themselves just as vulnerable to cavalry counterattack as hoplites; the faster the troop

If this interpretation is correct, it may explain the phenomenon—mentioned in Chapter 4 above—of units of light troops and cavalry disappearing from ancient battle accounts after their presence in the order of battle has been noted. If the pursuit was the crucial phase of battle, and each army would need fast troops for that phase regardless of whether the clash of the phalanxes fell out in their favour or not, it would make sense to hold such troops back from the initial engagement, even if they could potentially play a major role in it. Rather than risk the horsemen in a charge from which they might not return, it would have seemed prudent to hold them back until the moment when their intervention would make the greatest difference. In defeat, they could save the army; in victory, they could win the war. If the Greeks therefore did not always integrate such troops in their battle plans, it was not because they intended to limit their battles to a hoplite charge; it was because horses and light troops had far more important things to do than simply fight. The breaking and 'turning' of the enemy was only the opening phase of battle. Far from being reprehensible to the Greeks, the pursuit was a defining feature of their way of war.

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type, the greater its advantage. This must be why Xenophon focuses on horsemen in this context.

[65] Thuc. 6.70.3, 6.71.2, 6.101.5, 7.5.3, 7.6.2–3, 7.11.2–4.

## Last Rites

The final death toll, however, was not the way to determine who had won. The actual custom is somewhat puzzling in light of the shrewd ruthlessness that seems to characterise Classical Greek military practice in general. The example of Solygeia illustrates the point. At this amphibious battle, the victorious Athenians had to abandon the battlefield when enemy reinforcements arrived; they could not recover all the bodies of their own fallen before their hurried withdrawal to their ships. Two bodies remained on the shore, and the Athenians were forced to request a truce to collect them. This request meant that, despite their victory, they had been defeated (Thuc. 4.44.2–6). How do we explain this paradox? Could this, at last, be evidence of tacit rules shaping the Greek way of war?

During the Classical period, the Greeks followed up practically every engagement with two acts: the victors set up a trophy, and the defeated requested a truce to recover their dead. First attested in the second quarter of the fifth century,[66] these fixed elements of battle formally ended the fighting and made its outcome official. Those who set up a trophy had won, while those who had to ask for a truce to collect the fallen had lost. The origin of these practices is unknown, but the fact that Thucydides and Xenophon faithfully report them in formulaic sentences at the end of nearly every battle account plainly demonstrates their importance.[67] Numerous scholars have discussed them in detail,[68] and recent years have seen outstanding studies of the trophy in particular[69]—but, again, the evidence seems to allow for new interpretations that make more sense of these apparently agonal customs within the context of a brutal, unrestrained way of war.

The truce, always requested by a herald from the losing side, allowed the defeated army to collect and bury its dead. The request by its very nature implied that the bodies could not be recovered by force. As such, it amounted to a formal admission of defeat.[70] The decision to ask for a truce was therefore a momentous one; beaten troops whose spirits were still high would sometimes demand a second battle over the dead, unwilling to admit that they had lost. Some Spartans apparently raised this possibility at Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14), and the Spartan king Pausanias was in fact condemned to death partly for his failure to fight for the fallen at Haliartos in 395 (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.25; Plut. *Lys.* 29.1–2).[71] Even if a second battle was not an option, the Greeks sometimes attempted to take their dead back rather than ask for them. After a cavalry skirmish outside Athens in 431, both sides recovered their dead without a truce (Thuc. 2.22.2). When Agesilaos heard of the massacre at Lechaion, he rushed to the scene to seize the bodies, and was dismayed to find that they had already been recovered under truce (Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.7–8). Yet no actual example of a battle over the bodies is known. As a rule, Classical Greek battles ended when the victors granted the truce.

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[66] Krentz 2002, 32–34; Trundle 2013, 126–128; Lissarrague 2014, 59. Regarding the origin of truces to recover the dead, Krentz cites no evidence; the first historical instance is in fact the battle of Potidaia in 432 (Thuc. 1.63.3).

[67] Rawlings 2007, 97, 192. It has been argued (Nevin 2008, 115; Hau 2013) that the Greek historians were pointedly selective in their accounts of what happened in the aftermath of battle. However, the ubiquity of trophies and truces speaks against the notion that these authors were in any sense hesitant to report them.

[68] The standard modern overviews, with sources and bibliography, are Pritchett 1974, 246–275 (on trophies) and Pritchett 1985, 246–249 (on truces).

[69] Rabe 2008; Bettalli 2009; Trundle 2013; Lissarrague 2014.

The trophy (τρόπαιον), meanwhile, consisted of little more than a suit of armour nailed to a post.[72] In land battles, it was set up at the site of the 'turning'—indeed, its name is derived from this word (τροπή).[73] If battles had several focal points, sometimes the victors set up more than one trophy.[74] Once it had been built, the trophy was apparently considered inviolable; even if the losing side regained control of the battlefield, they were expected to leave it intact. We do not know why this was the case. It has been suggested that trophies may have been dedicated to one deity or another as a thank-offering, which implies that their destruction would have been seen as an act of sacrilege. Clear evidence, however, is lacking.[75] All we know is that trophies were left to stand on former battlefields for a long time as markers of one side's victory and the other's defeat. Late sources tell us that, as a compromise, the victors were supposed to construct the trophy out of perishable materials, so that it would eventually decay and fall apart.[76] However, we do not know if this rule actually applied in Classical Greece, or whether it is yet another example of Hellenistic and Roman authors idealising the past.

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[70] Diod. 15.87.3–4; Plut. *Nik.* 6.5–6; Anderson 1970, 3–4; Pritchett 1985, 246–249; Rabe 2008, 9.

[71] Westlake 1985, 130–131.

[72] Pritchett 1974, 264–269, lists all known attestations.

[73] Trundle 2013, 126; Lissarrague 2014, 57.

[74] Thuc. 5.3.4 (two), 7.24.1 (three), 7.45.1 (two); Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.10 (two).

[75] For the theory, see especially Ducrey 1985, 274. Pritchett accepted that trophies were inviolable (1974, 258–259), but noted that their religious meaning remained unclear and contested (247–249). Lissarrague (2014, 58) rejects a religious connection altogether.

[76] Diod. 13.24.5–6; Cic. *Inv.* 2.69–70; Plut. *Mor.* 273c–d.

Indeed, none of the conventions surrounding trophies was written in stone, and the sources show these markers being met with a range of disrespectful responses. Plutarch tells us that Epameinondas openly laughed at the trophy set up by Chabrias after the latter's light troops killed a few reckless Thebans outside the walls of Corinth (*Mor.* 193e–f). Some of the beaten Spartans at Leuktra urged their comrades to prevent the Thebans setting up the marker for their victory (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14). King Agis is said to have called on the Athenians to sally and fight for possession of a trophy they had themselves set up outside their walls; his unchallenged taunts and possession of the field effectively nullified the Athenian victory (Diod. 13.73.1). Worse could happen if the outcome of a battle was seen as an insult. Xenophon regarded it as a sign of Agesilaos' remarkable self-control that he did not destroy the trophy his enemies had set up at Lechaion to mark the massacre of the Spartans at the hands of Iphikrates' peltasts (*Hell.* 4.5.10). The clear implication is that a lesser man would have thrown it down. This could actually happen if those who had set up a trophy were no longer able to protect it: the Milesians destroyed an Athenian trophy in 412 after the Athenian fleet left their land (Thuc. 8.24.1). Finally, if the outcome of a battle was disputed, both sides might set up a trophy (Thuc. 4.97.2–101.1; Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.24). In such cases, the markers signified the opposite of what they were supposed to—a continuing conflict rather than a victory.[77]

Truces were sometimes treated with similar cynicism. The Thebans repeatedly tried to use the enemy dead as strategic bargaining chips,[78] and Epameinondas is said to have used the truce as an opportunity to humiliate the Spartans at Leuktra by making them gather their bodies last, so that all their allies and enemies could see how many of them had died (Paus. 9.13.11–12). In two cases—although both reported only by later sources—the victors despised their defeated enemies so much that they refused to grant the truce at all.[79]

Nevertheless, both truce and trophy have long been regarded as genuinely agonal aspects of warfare, prescribing the correct behaviour of the Greeks. The truce was a self-imposed limitation of the brutal violence of Archaic warfare, showing a newfound respect for the dead. The trophy, meanwhile, was an expression of the victor's final possession of the battlefield; it represented one of the ways in which land warfare was formalised and restricted in space and time once the clash of phalanxes had become the typical way to fight a battle.[80] The trophy was an inviolable assertion of both the end of the fighting and its winner. Neither could be called into question. Trophies therefore served as the great symbolic prize of a form of warfare in which control of the battlefield had become an end in itself. As such, trophies carried immense prestige; ancient authors used them as a shorthand for victory, conquest and glory.[81] Their symbolic value provides the reason for the Greeks' wrangling over who could rightly set them up and when.[82]

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[77] Thuc. 1.105.6, 4.134, 7.54; Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.26; Diod. 15.87.2.

[78] Van Wees 2004, 136–137; Nevin 2008.

[79] Namely, Lysander at Aigospotamoi in 405 (Paus. 9.32.9; this is neither confirmed nor contradicted by Xenophon) and the Lokrians after a skirmish with Philomelos in 355 (Diod. 16.25.2–3).

This interpretation, however, is incomplete. The features of the new form of battle may explain the date of the first trophies, their name, and their typical location on the battlefield,[83] but they do not explain *why* they appeared. Why did the Classical Greeks consider it necessary to confirm the outcome of battles with a marker? Why would the possession of a field full of dead men matter to them? Why was there a need for any kind of formal custom here, when the distinction between victors and defeated was usually obvious either way?

A possible explanation lies in the stretch of time between the 'turning' and the construction of the turning-point marker. While it may be naïve to take at face value the conventional grouping of trophy and truce as the final scene of many battle accounts, it is nevertheless clear that the trophy was not set up 'as soon as the enemy had fled'.[84] Whenever the sources give us any indication of the moment at which the trophy was set up, it is revealed that a significant amount of time had passed since the enemy was routed. Sometimes the victorious army had to march a long way back to the place where the rout had begun:

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[80] Garlan 1972, 40; Lonis 1979, 138; Vaughn 1991, 48; Sage 1996, 100; Ober 1999, 56; Lendon 2005, 42; Trundle 2013, 131–132; Lissarrague 2014, 58.

[81] Note for example the boast that Isokrates put in Archidamos' mouth, that the Spartans 'filled Europe and Asia with trophies' (6.54), Demosthenes' allusion of the glory of Chabrias by reference to his trophies (20.83), and Plutarch's story that Perikles' friends measured his achievements by the number of trophies he set up (*Per.* 38.3).

[82] Pritchett 1974, 273–275; 1985, 246, 248; Van Wees 2004, 137–138; Christ 2006, 110, 112–113.

[83] Krentz (2002, 34) and Van Wees (2004, 183) have taken trophies as evidence for the rise of phalanx battle; in the fluid battles of earlier times, there was no single decisive 'turning' to be marked.

[84] Jackson 1991, 239; this misconception is apparently shared by Bettalli (2009, 363) and Lissarrague (2014, 59, 61).

> … οἱ ἡττώμενοι τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἔφευγον πρὸς τὰ τείχη: ἔπειτα δ᾽ εἰρξάντων Κορινθίων πάλιν κατεσκήνησαν εἰς τὸ ἀρχαῖον στρατόπεδον. Λακεδαιμόνιοι δ᾽ αὖ ἐπαναχωρήσαντες, ἔνθα τὸ πρῶτον τοῖς πολεμίοις συνέμειξαν, ἐστήσαντο τροπαῖον.
>
> … the defeated first fled to the city wall; but when the Corinthians shut them out, they went back to their old camp. The Lakedaimonians, returning to the place where they first engaged the enemy, set up a trophy.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 4.2.23[85]

> τούτου δὲ γενομένου οἱ Κορίνθιοι τοὺς νεκροὺς πρὸς τὸ τεῖχος ἑλκύσαντες καὶ ὑποσπόνδους ἀποδόντες τροπαῖον ἔστησαν.
>
> After this the Corinthians dragged the bodies to the wall, and, when they had given them back under a truce, they set up a trophy.
>
> XEN. *Hell.* 7.1.19[86]

In some cases, the trophy was not set up until the following day, or even later.[87] Despite its direct connection to the fighting effort of the hoplite body, the turning-point marker was not an instant celebration of a job well done.

What was the victorious army doing in the intervening period? Obviously the use of captured armour for the trophy implies that the bodies of the enemy dead were being stripped. But this does not explain the passages above, which involve a considerable delay and a march back to the site where the turning-point marker was to be built. In fact, the previous section has made the activities of the victors abundantly clear, and Thucydides helps us connect the dots:

> καὶ ἡ ἄλλη στρατιὰ ἀναχωρήσασα μετὰ τοῦ Κλεαρίδου ἐκ τῆς διώξεως νεκρούς τε ἐσκύλευσε καὶ τροπαῖον ἔστησεν.
>
> The rest of the army, returning with Klearidas from the pursuit, stripped the dead and set up a trophy.
>
> THUC. 5.10.12

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[85] For similar scenes, see Xen. *An.* 6.5.31–32; *Hell.* 7.4.25.

[86] This episode involved dragging the bodies over seven hundred meters to the city wall, and then going back over a hundred meters out from the wall to set up the trophy.

[87] See for example Thuc. 1.105.6; 3.109.2; 8.24.1; Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.21; Plut. *Tim.* 29.2.

> … ἐπακολουθήσαντες δὲ ἁθρόοι ὅσον ἀσφαλῶς εἶχε πάλιν ἐπανεχώρουν καὶ τροπαῖον ἵστασαν.
>
> [*The Athenians*] bunched together and pursued them as far as they safely could, and then turned back and set up a trophy.
>
> THUC. 6.70.3

Whatever the moral value of trophies, the pursuit was an overriding priority. If it was possible to chase the fleeing enemy, the trophy was never set up first.

This order of business makes perfect sense if we accept that the pursuit was the intended result of Greek battles—but it should also make us rethink the concept of the trophy. What we effectively see in many surviving battle accounts is a victorious army going through all the possible stages of battle, including a pursuit carried on as long as daylight allowed, and *only then* setting up a trophy. No one stayed behind to do this while the others chased the fleeing enemy, even if the looting of enemy corpses had presumably already begun. The building of the trophy was invariably the last thing that happened. As long as the enemy had been decisively beaten, it did not matter if the construction of the turning-point marker had to wait until morning. The winners could build it at their leisure, and even make a show of it, as Agesilaos did at Koroneia, forming up his men with garlands on their heads as flute-players played (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.21).

What, then, did a trophy stand for? It clearly did not symbolise the end of the violence of battle; there are no grounds for the modern view that it represented a supposed Greek habit of limiting battles to the clash of the hoplites. In fact, its construction only after the end of the chase suggests the opposite—that it was meant to celebrate the final phase of battle most of all. Thucydides makes this very explicit:

> μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο Συρακόσιοι μὲν τῆς τε ναυμαχίας τροπαῖον ἔστησαν καὶ τῆς ἄνω τῆς πρὸς τῷ τείχει ἀπολήψεως τῶν ὁπλιτῶν, ὅθεν καὶ τοὺς ἵππους ἔλαβον, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ἧς τε οἱ Τυρσηνοὶ τροπῆς ἐποιήσαντο τῶν πεζῶν ἐς τὴν λίμνην καὶ ἧς αὐτοὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ στρατοπέδῳ.
>
> After this the Syracusans set up a trophy for the naval battle and for the hoplites they had cut off at the wall, where they captured the horses; and the Athenians set up a trophy for the infantry the Tyrrhenians drove into the marsh, and for their own pursuit with the rest of the army.
>
> THUC. 7.54

This passage allows us to reconsider the meaning of trophies entirely. It describes in plain terms how these markers were built to memorialise mass killing. They are directly connected to each group of enemy warriors killed. In other words, they did not mark the successful completion of battle, but the successful completion of slaughter. The reference to the 'turning' in their name does not refer to the end of the fighting, but to the end of the enemy's resistance and the beginning of unimpeded killing. Rabe has argued that the trophy was set up at the exact point where the losing side showed its inferiority, and the winners' superiority was made clear.[88] I would take this one step further: the turning-point marker not only established the superiority of the victors, but also celebrated their exploitation of this fact. The trophy, dressed up in arms that were stripped from the enemy dead, was an offering of the fruits of their brutal work. It symbolises the fact that the purpose of Greek battle, and the aim of Greek tactical thought, was not to rout the enemy, but to destroy him.

This interpretation makes it easy to explain conflicts over the right to set up a trophy. If neither side felt they had been defeated to the extent that a trophy proclaimed, it would seem natural to challenge the enemy's claim to have achieved such an outcome. An enemy trophy was a statement of power, a celebration of unrestrained bloodshed; its implied humiliation would inevitably serve as an occasional source for further conflict. The Spartans at Leuktra thought of interrupting the construction of the Theban trophy because their army still outnumbered the Theban force, and they did not agree that the losses they had sustained had been decisive (Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14). In battles where both sides set up rival trophies, it was because both sides believed they should commemorate the losses they inflicted; for the Corinthians in 460, it apparently did not matter that twelve days had passed before they could safely march out to do so (Thuc. 1.105.6).

In most cases, however, the defeated were made to acknowledge the victors' status by force. The massacre itself, as conspicuous destruction, was meant to achieve this aim. If it could not, the victors possessed a great alternative in the form of the enemy dead. These bodies, as several scholars have pointed out, had to be recovered.[89] Citizen warriors attached immense value to the proper treatment of every last one of their fallen peers; moreover, as Onasander makes clear, no troops would fight reliably without the assurance that, if they fell, their remains would be handled correctly (*Strat.* 36.1–2). We have seen how Nikias was willing to give up his claim to victory at Solygeia—his claim to have slaughtered the enemy with impunity—in order to recover the two bodies that remained on the beach (Thuc. 4.44.5–6; Plut. *Nik.* 5–6). The Athenian generals who won the battle of Arginousai were famously condemned to death because they failed to collect all of the dead (Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.4–34; Diod. 13.100.1–4, 13.101, 15.35.1). Their duty to the fallen meant that those who had lost control of the battlefield had no choice but to ask for a truce to retrieve the dead, and thereby accept the outcome of the battle and the construction of a monument to their suffering.

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[88] Rabe 2008, 8.

[89] Vaughn 1991, 39–40; Van Wees 2004, 138; Krentz 2007, 175; Rawlings 2007, 98–99, 193–194.

Inevitably, the power this moral imperative gave to those who possessed the dead soon made that possession an end in itself. Tactical thought was promptly applied to the question how the enemy dead could best be secured. In the aftermath of First Mantineia, the Spartans formed up their army in front of the enemy dead (Thuc. 5.74.2); at Koroneia they moved the dead within their lines (Xen. *Ag.* 2.15).[90] At Corinth in 369, as we have seen, Corinthian light troops dragged the bodies all the way to the cover of the city wall. In each case they were pointedly taken out of the enemy's reach, forcing the losing side to request their return. In this way a defeated enemy could be compelled to recognise his loss and face humiliation.[91] This recognition could serve as a neat substitute for the sort of undeniable victory that resulted from extensive massacre of the enemy—especially in cases like First Mantineia and Koroneia, where the pursuit was short and apparently fruitless.[92] The truce was therefore not a limitation to Greek behaviour out of respect for the fallen, but a deliberate use of the dead as leverage in order to obtain the enemy's formal admission of defeat. The phenomenon mentioned above of Thebans adding further demands before returning the enemy dead is really only a logical extension of this principle. The fact that the truce was normally granted shows only that, when it was requested, the enemy dead had served their purpose, and nothing further could be gained from holding on to them. In short, the truce—always requested by the defeated, never offered by the winners—was not a generous concession to the tacit rules of war, but a contrived display of power meant only to confirm the status of the victor and further humiliate the losing side.

The trophy and truce, then, formed an interlocking set of customs meant primarily to broadcast the victors' successful massacre of the enemy. None of this seems agonal or restrictive in the slightest. However, the Greeks appear to have been trapped in this abusive system due to their overriding moral obligation to take care of their own dead. Tellingly, no Classical Greek military treatise says anything about the rituals at the end of battle. While Aineias the Tactician, for example, is happy to discuss ways in which religious festivals could be used as an opportunity for a coup or a surprise attack (4.8, 17), and Xenophon reports several times how the Argives 'pleaded the sacred months' in order to escape Spartan ravaging (Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2–3, 5.1.29),[93] there is not a hint of the notion that post-battle truces could be used to one's advantage in similar ways. The silence of military thinkers on this subject strongly suggests that here, for once, a restriction on military action was actually widely acknowledged and respected. If Onasander is right that the proper treatment of the dead was essential to maintaining troop morale, it follows that lost bodies simply had to be recovered, and no plan to take advantage of the enemy's preoccupation with their own dead could be contemplated. Thucydides was outraged by the Theban refusal to return the bodies of the Athenians killed at Delion—even if he was equally incensed by the Athenian occupation and fortification of sacred ground during the same campaign.[94] Only if they were considered guilty of some terrible crime, such as imperial cruelty or temple-robbing, could men be refused their right to a proper burial.

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[90] This detail does not occur in the parallel account of Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.21.

[91] Pritchett 1974, 260–262.

[92] At First Mantineia, Thucydides (5.73.1 and 4) tells us as much; at Koroneia it can be surmised from the surprisingly low death toll on the losing side (just six hundred according to Diod. 14.84.2; see Krentz 1985a, 18–19).

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In the decisive moment of battle, the hoplites' amateurism caught up with them: untrained, uncontrollable and liable to panic, they could not be a dependable backbone for armies in battle, even if they were more suited for this task than any other troop type the Greeks were familiar with. The Greeks applied all their ingenuity to this problem, but the egalitarian values of the hoplite militia are likely to have been an obstacle to various improvements, which consequently only mercenary armies could make. With little scope for substantial change, militia commanders did everything in their power to keep the hoplites in the fight until the enemy's morale could be critically weakened, whether by careful deployment, attrition, or the intervention of other troops.

When the enemy broke, Greek armies revealed their true face. They were not proponents of fairness, fighting short and sharp battles for limited gain, but butchers, seeking to do maximum damage to the enemy in his moment of weakness. This was their purpose when going into battle, and this was what they confirmed by setting up a trophy at the end. Even in victory, their preferred treatment of the enemy was to destroy their capacity to resist, and then to force them, in a humiliating ritual, to acknowledge that they had lost.

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[93] For further examples see Goodman/Holladay 1986, 153–154; Krentz 2002, 26 n. 14.

[94] Thuc. 4.97–100; for Thucydides' (partly selfish) motives in highlighting the episode, see Nevin 2008, 101–105, 111–115.

# Conclusion

## The Context of Tactical Thought

A great deal of scholarship has appeared in recent decades to challenge the old notion that the Greek way of war was agonal, rule-bound, circumscribed by cultural conventions that restricted its form and scale. Neither the view itself nor its socio-political underpinnings now remain uncontroversial. Yet the revisionists have rarely discussed tactics in detail, and there has been no synthesis of recent scholarship applied specifically to its famous peculiarities. The present work has tried to fill that gap. Radical reinterpretations of the structures and values that shaped Greek warfare invite a new analysis of its tactical principles, and I have tried to build such an analysis from the ground up. How do we characterise the tactical thought and practice of the Classical Greeks? What ideals and what realities shaped their approaches to battle?

The context of tactical thought is an essential element of the answer. The specific problems to which tactical thinking is applied are set by military reality—and at the beginning of the Classical period that reality had been recently and drastically altered by developments in the political and economic organisation of Greek city-states.[1] While mass levies of infantry were already a feature of warfare in the Archaic period, it was not until the very end of the sixth century that large hoplite armies first appeared on the scene. From this time on, the hoplite body purged other troop types from its lines and began to develop an increasingly regular formation. Cavalry, specialist light troops, and the hoplite phalanx itself were therefore relatively new and unfamiliar features of warfare at the time of the Persian Wars. The shape of battle had changed beyond recognition. For the first time, citizen levies were organised around a substantial core of heavy infantry that collectively engaged the enemy in close combat. City-states now relied on these hoplites to win their battles, as they had done in spectacular fashion when the Persians invaded Greece.

Nothing could therefore be more fundamental to Greek tactical thought than the fact that the hoplite militia was completely untrained. Throughout the Classical period, they remained ignorant of formation drill; they were not subdivided into manageable tactical units, so that even their lowest-ranking officers led groups of several hundred men. They appear to have known how to form up in ranks and files in preparation for battle, but they could not

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[1] For the essential account see Van Wees 2013, 236–244.

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move without breaking formation, and never learned to manoeuvre as one. No official programmes existed for the practice of weapon proficiency either, so that hoplites knew little more about using their equipment than what they were willing to learn by themselves—and their enthusiasm for such private instruction was low. The rich may have treasured athletic training, but it was of doubtful value in war unless it followed very particular guidelines; meanwhile, specifically military training was ridiculed as a pointless exertion that only encouraged arrogance and false expectations. Most Greek citizens learned how to fight from their sparse experience alone. Their states counted on generals to win battles with armies made up of amateurs who improvised all aspects of war.

In this environment, Sparta was the embodiment of the proverb that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. The military abilities of the Spartans are easily overstated; like other Greeks, they fielded a militia army led by amateur officers, whose methods were informal and unregulated, and whose obedience was not guaranteed. They appear to have disdained weapons training, focusing their exercise programme exclusively on fitness and endurance; they only drilled their men in a few basic formation evolutions once they were already on campaign. Nevertheless, they derived an enormous advantage from the fact that they bothered to organise and train their men at all. Their ruthless upbringing made Spartans willing to accept military authority where it was needed; they were used to following orders issued by their detailed officer hierarchy, and they recognised the value of measured collective action in battle. Subjects and allies who fought at their side were required to follow suit. The result was an army that, unlike any other Greek force, could march in step, obey the commands of the general in battle, and manoeuvre *en masse*. Their training made Spartan-led forces capable of a few simple but essential feats of tactical prowess that only the most experienced and dedicated Greek armies ever learned to match.

With these forces, the Spartans caused a dangerous imbalance in the Greek tactical system. The writings of Thucydides, Xenophon and Plato show that others were very aware of this imbalance; they described precisely what made the Spartans so effective, and Xenophon in particular went out of his way to advertise Spartan methods to his audience. Both Xenophon and Plato envisioned an ideal world in which the militias of other states would adopt a similar system of training and discipline. This training effort would correct the imbalance, reduce the uncertainty of battle, and give ambitious city-states an edge in their ongoing wars against other Greeks.

Yet the efforts of these tactically minded authors were in vain. The hoplites of the Greek world chose to believe that, for the rare occasions when they were called upon to fight a pitched battle, valour and strength would suffice. They saw greater value in the courage to charge the enemy lines than in the skill to do well when they got there. They consequently rejected the hard work of drill, laughed at those who trained for battle, and attacked generals who tried to impose discipline either in court or in person. Only the most persistent and inspiring commanders had any hope of convincing their men to commit to basic military training. A few states eventually raised small standing units of hoplites, but we do not know what instruction they received. It was not until the very end of the Classical period that a mandatory training programme was finally introduced at Athens.

As a result, all Greek tactical thought outside Sparta arose from a context of self-imposed, ideologically reinforced amateurism. The average hoplite militia preferred to remain a cumbersome mass of warriors—yet this mass, the people in arms, had to be preserved at all costs. Modern scholars have often characterised Greek armies as collections of highly trained and effective heavy infantry led by generals whose notion of tactics was primitive, and whose role consisted of nothing more than leading the hoplite charge. The opposite seems closer to the truth. Generals whose understanding of tactics may have been comprehensive were forced nevertheless to adopt the crudest of approaches to battle and to risk their own lives in frontal assaults because their men were incapable of anything more sophisticated than that.

Greek tactics, in short, were necessarily limited. Commanders and tactical theorists faced severe structural problems of organisation, skill and discipline, and they could rely on little more than their own ingenuity to tackle them. This is reflected in the battle accounts we find in the sources. We should bear this context in mind whenever we find tactical elements that appear at first sight to be primitive or restricted.

## A New Model of Hoplite Battle

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Prussians drew up a template of phalanx battle intended to sum up the tactical forms of major engagements from the beginning of the Classical period down to the time of Epameinondas. What they created was a simplified narrative of Greek tactical developments—a straightforward progression from primitivism to Alexander—which served their conceptual and didactic purposes. Yet the template stuck. For decades it was repeated and refined in all major works on the subject, and to this day there are those who insist that all hoplite battles essentially took the same form. Two armies met at a prearranged time on a specially selected patch of flat land; both lined up all their hoplites in monolithic formations, eight ranks deep, with their best troops on the right. In the advance, both armies drew to the right, so that each right wing ended up surrounding and routing the enemy's left. The two victorious right wings proceeded to either face off for a decisive second clash, or to go home, content with their partial victories. There was no pursuit. Light infantry and cavalry were deliberately excluded from these battles. They were fair, open, 'short and sharp' engagements of hoplite phalanxes, by which whole wars were decided in an afternoon.

This model has little to recommend it. While each point can be supported with some examples, to claim that any of them were standard practice is to disregard the bulk of the evidence. One of the structural problems of much modern scholarship on Greek warfare has been its tendency to build its theories and assumptions on this set of unjustifiable generalisations. But is it possible to update the model? Can we create a new, more accurate template that describes the usual features of Greek battle in similar detail?

If our aim is to draw the various units and their movements in neat coloured blocks and arrows on a tactical map, the answer is no. The deployments and formation depths used by the Greeks are too varied, and our detailed examples too few, to allow for any schematic rendering of a 'normal' engagement between Classical armies. We may know enough about a handful of major battles to sketch diagrams of the combatants' dispositions and manoeuvres, but the result would only testify to their diversity; in most cases, we simply do not have all the data we need. Even Hanson, the most passionate defender of the view that Greek warfare was bound by strict rules and conventions, has conceded that in this sense 'there is no typical hoplite battle'.[2]

Yet this is not the only possible approach to the question. We should not be tempted, like the Prussians, to make Greek warfare conform to the terms and visualisations of the contemporary military academy. There are other, more abstract ways in which the Classical Greek approach to battle clearly did follow certain patterns. These patterns are already visible in Herodotos' description of the Persian Wars, and they remain consistent all through the works of Thucydides and Xenophon. They resulted from the context of amateur warfare described above, and from the efforts of commanders and tactical thinkers to work effectively within that context. The following summary of these patterns constitutes what I believe to be the closest we can get to a new model of hoplite battle.

First, Greek armies intending to fight a battle would do everything in their power to ensure that the odds were stacked in their favour. To fight fairly was to court disaster; if the decision came down to sheer force of arms and will, all would depend on the untrained hoplite levy, and victory could not be guaranteed. Fair fights in the open were therefore avoided wherever possible. Armies sought to face the enemy on favourable ground, with superior numbers, and with supporting forces coming up from behind. Catching the enemy off guard was known to be particularly effective, and so battles were begun without warning, sometimes from a hidden position, and ideally when the enemy was entirely unprepared. Alternatively, cunning generals would try to compel their enemies to rush into a fight at place and time of their choosing.

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[2] Hanson 2013, 267.

Most pitched battles involved some manipulation of their time and place to the greater advantage of either side. If many of them still ended up being fought on plains, with both sides having time to deploy, it was only because armies would normally refuse to engage an enemy whose advantage was clear; sometimes the odds had to be levelled to some extent if a battle was to take place at all.

In such cases, a second priority took over: safeguarding the hoplite phalanx. The phalanx formed the backbone of most armies in battle, but it lacked training, organisation and discipline; it was vulnerable to missiles, liable to panic, and easy prey if it fell into disorder. Moreover, when hoplites marched into the plain, they were out of their comfort zone. In open ground, horsemen had the advantage over all other troop types. Only the tight cohesion of a hoplite formation gave it any chance at all against mounted attack. If the battle was to hinge on them, the hoplites needed protection.

The best option was to draw up the heavy infantry in a single line from one protective terrain feature to another. Plains narrowed by hills, rivers, marshes or walls were favoured positions. If such deployment was impossible, the hoplites could rely on the other detachments of their army. Phalanxes practically never went into battle unsupported; most armies contained sizeable contingents of light troops, often including some smaller units of specialist peltasts or archers, and many would bring their own cavalry to the fight. It is a commonplace of modern scholarship that the Greek historians looked down on such troops and neglected to mention their contributions, but in fact they report on their actions and strengths repeatedly and in detail. Light infantry, the bane of unsupported hoplites, could serve as a protective screen or cover the flanks of the phalanx. Horsemen were invaluable as a guard against their counterparts in the enemy army, and frequently played a decisive role, whether on the march or in battle.

Once the integrity of the line and the flanks of the phalanx were secured, the next priority was to come up with a plan to defeat the enemy. This point may seem entirely obvious, but it is important to emphasise that Greek commanders appear to have assessed each upcoming battle according to its particular circumstances and challenges. Militia armies did not have the training to perform even the most basic manoeuvres in battle, so most plans consisted of little more than drawing up the troops in a certain order and depth and sending them forward—yet even here, the Greeks made deliberate choices each time, rather than relying on a restrictive traditional template.

The plans they came up with may be grouped into two basic forms. The first, perhaps the older of the two, was to outflank the enemy with the naturally extended right wing of the phalanx and roll up his line. This plan generally involved the commander placing himself and his leading contingent on the right wing, where they would obtain the glory of victory. The second plan was to engage the enemy's best troops head-on, in the hope of breaking them and forcing the collapse of the enemy army. Such a plan required the general and his most reliable troops to take up a position opposite the enemy's main contingent, wherever that contingent happened to be. As a result, some of the earliest battles of which we have a detailed description already show armies being led from the left wing or from the centre. The question of honour in the deployment of contingents in a phalanx appears to have depended entirely on which plan was chosen; whichever unit would get to claim a greater share in the victory would consider its position one of honour.

At some point during the fifth century, it was discovered that a deeper formation yielded more reliable results in either scenario. Depth usually formed an effective remedy to the skittishness of the hoplite levy; at the same time, a formation that appeared unlikely to break under pressure would have a great psychological impact on its opponents. Coupled with the need to protect the flanks of the phalanx, this discovery resulted in one of the defining dilemmas of Greek tactical thought—the search for the perfect balance between width and depth. Throughout the Classical period, the problem remained unresolved, and no standard depth was ever declared.

There were other ways, however, in which generals tried to respond to the basic scenarios sketched here. Commanders were handicapped by the fact that they had almost no control over the large and semi-autonomous contingents of their line, and that the militia was not trained to respond to changing orders even if those orders could somehow be passed down. However, smaller units *could* be directly controlled, and carefully coordinated groups of a few hundred infantry or cavalry could have a disproportionate impact in battle. Generals therefore did what they could to anticipate the enemy's tactical plans, and to use ever more professional and capable detachments of elite troops to sabotage those plans. From the Persian Wars onward, we see skirmishes and battles being decided by the timely arrival or well-directed charge of picked hoplite units and horsemen.

Forces trained by Spartans were the only ones capable of manoeuvres on a larger scale. As long as the chain of command remained intact, this ability gave them a great advantage in battle against less organised hoplite militias. Yet we should not be tempted to overstate Spartan exceptionalism in terms of tactical thought; for the most part, Spartan armies followed the same patterns in battle as the forces of other Greek city-states. Spartans, too, sought to engage in a favourable place at a favourable time; they too relied on terrain features and support troops to safeguard their phalanx; they too picked one or the other of the two basic plans that determined the shape of hoplite battle. The main difference was that their phalanx was much better prepared to play its part. As long as the vulnerability of the hoplite body compelled all sides to manipulate the battle so that nothing could interfere with its advance, Spartan-led armies had a structural advantage over all their opponents. Several battles were decided by the ability of Spartan levies to respond to the circumstances of battle with sweeping manoeuvres carried out by thousands of men at once.

More often, though, the decisive element was not their tactics, but the terrifying sight of their approach. Hoplite levies—untrained, poorly organised and led by brave example—behaved unpredictably in battle; the hoplites' awareness of their dependence on each other made them unlikely to stand their ground if they noticed any part of their line giving way. Phalanx battle therefore hinged on morale. Many Greeks thought fighting skill so secondary to courage that they did not find it worth cultivating at all—but these Greeks were wrong, because a display of Spartan discipline and tactical skill could quickly deflate the courage of the average hoplite. In this way the Spartans warped the typical course of Greek battle to such an extent that they regularly won without having to strike a single blow.

Once the enemy had been put to flight, however—and despite Thucydides' claim to the contrary—the Spartans seem to have fallen once again into the same pattern followed by other Greeks: the ruthless pursuit and slaughter of their defeated enemies. Of all the elements of battle, this one comes closest to being a general rule. It was so universally and enthusiastically carried out that we should regard it as the tacit goal of every pitched battle. The Greeks seem to have wanted nothing more than to take advantage of the enemy's moment of helplessness and inflict maximal damage at minimal risk. First, the embattled hoplites vented their frustration on anyone they could catch. Then, light infantry and horsemen—at times held back for this very purpose—chased the scattered enemy as far as they could, killing at will. Only the arrival of reinforcements, the proximity of friendly city walls, or the fall of night could save them.

When the massacre was over, the victors set up a trophy to celebrate the achievement. This monument marked the point at which the danger dissipated and the unopposed killing began—the point at which tactics had achieved their intention and the victors could reap their reward. The defeated, meanwhile, were put in a difficult position by the pressing need to recover the bodies of the fallen from ground they no longer possessed. This universal obligation was exploited by the victors, who sometimes forcibly took control of the dead in order to use them as a guarantee that the enemy would acknowledge their claim to victory. Far from a generous and gentlemanly act of respect for the dead, the granting of the truce was therefore only a way to obtain formal and symbolic confirmation of what tactics and slaughter had achieved.

These were the typical features of pitched battle during the Classical period. Taken together, they add up to a reasonably comprehensive new model of the principles that shaped such engagements. Where their focus overlaps, the contrast with the old model is striking. Not only does the Prussian model appear clearly and consistently inaccurate, but on a number of points our sources actually suggest *the exact opposite* of its claims. Instead of prearranging battles, the Greeks often struck when it was least expected. Instead of fighting on open plains, they tried to bait their enemies into attacking a strong position, or at least tried to find ground that would cover their flanks and their retreat. Light troops and cavalry, far from being irrelevant to hoplite battle, actually shaped and defined it by their complete superiority over hoplites in any but the most carefully restricted conditions; our modern impression of a way of war dominated by hoplites is largely the result of Greek tactical skill at securing these conditions for their hoplites' sake. Moreover, in the aftermath of battle, heavy infantry could neither exploit a victory nor survive a defeat without the support of horsemen and missile troops. Finally, the pursuit, which the Prussians claimed had no place in the wars of the Greeks, appears to have been the greatest hope and desire of all Greek armies that resolved to fight a battle.

Still, few of the elements of this new model are so singular in nature or so consistently attested that they could allow us to fill in the gaps of less detailed battle accounts with as much confidence as scholars using the Prussian model have often done. The conscious or unconscious use of the Prussian template as a *prescriptive* model has been the cause of much distortion in modern scholarship on Greek warfare. We have seen how this distortion has affected the historiography of the battle of Leuktra: scholars continue to presuppose groundbreaking innovations that appear to be little more than a self-inflicted mirage. The greatest flaw of the old model, then, is not its set of individual clauses, but its widely repeated claim to universality. If the summary of typical features presented here tells us anything, it is that the temptation to search for unwritten rules, rigid traditions and moments of revolutionary change should be firmly resisted.

The viability of the new model therefore rests on the extent to which it accommodates different options. The only way to do justice to Greek tactical thought and practice is by acknowledging that Greek armies and their commanders, though they operated within a broadly similar set of parameters, approached each battle as a unique problem. They assessed the capabilities of their enemies' forces and their own, and acted accordingly. Variables such as terrain, the relative numbers of opposing armies, the identity of contingents present, the availability of missile troops and cavalry, and the extent of the enemy's alertness meant that battles could take radically different forms.

The goal, however, was always the same: to do massive damage to the enemy at the smallest possible cost in friendly lives. This point is crucial. If we ask ourselves to what extent Greek warring methods were defined by restrictive ideals, the answer offered by this model is clear: at no point until the formal end of battle did the Greeks allow their behaviour to be dictated by unwritten rules. Unfair advantages were actively sought; surprise attacks were common; deployments were chosen purely for practical reasons; commanders explored a range of tactical expedients in their constant attempts to outwit the enemy. Routing the opposing army was not the aim of battle, but the means to an end. That end was slaughter. From the choice of the moment of battle to the use of mobile reserves, the aim of all tactical decisions was to remove the enemy's ability to fight back, and then to kill him. Fairness and deliberate limitations had no place in this kind of fight. Greek tactical thought was driven by pragmatism; the Greeks fought to win, and their ideal was to use their limited means with the greatest possible courage and ingenuity to achieve this.

## The Greek Way of War

What does this analysis of tactics tell us about Greek warfare as a whole? For one thing, it shows the inaccuracy of the common developmental model in which a restrained and traditional form of fighting suddenly escalated into ruthless and bitter warfare during the drawn-out Peloponnesian War. With a few controversial exceptions,[3] fairness was not a guiding principle of Greek warfare in any period. The few general claims to the contrary that we find in the sources are patently rhetorical and false. Instead, from the first appearance of hoplite-heavy militia armies around the time of the Persian Wars, we see Greeks using such armies to win battles by any available means. By the early years of the Peloponnesian War, the common battle plans that resulted from this approach were already well enough understood that they could be anticipated and countered.[4] The Classical period saw some modest steps toward professionalisation, for example in the creation of standing units of *epilektoi*, and a few tactical innovations, like the cascading charge—but the Greeks ended the period with broadly the same military realities and tactical toolbox that they had at the beginning.

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[3] I am referring here to such things as the treaty banning missiles during the Lelantine War, which may or may not be historical (see especially Wheeler 1987), and the Battle of the

What we see instead is city-states coming to grips with the new tactical system that emerged at the end of the Archaic period. Large hoplite armies had great potential, but they also posed new challenges of organisation and control, and their many weaknesses meant that a whole new approach to campaign and battle had to be constructed around them. The typical features of hoplite battle gradually crystallised as the Greeks got into the habit. At the same time, however, they tried all expedients they could think of to exploit the vulnerabilities of the new system, and to perfect its elements to increase the chances of a successful outcome in battle. Some elements, such as the amateurism of the hoplite levy, could not be changed; they remained constant factors in Greek tactical thought and practice until the end of the Classical period. Other elements, such as the need for cavalry and a dependable hoplite elite, resulted in the increasingly structural and often state-supported formation of specialist troops from either the citizen body or the mercenary market. Tactical needs were recognised, talked about, and responded to. Throughout the Classical period the Greeks got better at fighting the kind of battle the rise of homogenous unit types and combined arms warfare had dictated.

The bigger picture, then, is one of Greek city-states lumbering into organised warfare. They did not all do so at the same pace or by the same route; in some ways, Sparta was ahead of the rest for most of the fifth and fourth centuries. Still, generally speaking, the tendency was not towards a breakdown of traditional rules, but towards an increase of means to achieve the same destructive goals as before. As the Greeks learned to wield their large hoplite

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Champions, discussed in Chapter 3. The unifying theme seems to be that these attempts to impose restraint were limited in scope, unique, and (in the case of proposals to do battle with even numbers) spectacularly unsuccessful.

[4] As Lee (2013, 144) put it, ‘the military systems that fought the Peloponnesian War were forged in the decades that preceded it’.

levies—forming them up in phalanxes, supporting them with organised units of light troops and cavalry, and exploring the possibilities of reserves, manoeuvre and training—they were increasingly forced to recognise that an effective army needed a strong command structure with a general who knew what he was doing, and a strong financial structure that could supply the army's needs. Such realisations will have fuelled developments in state organisation and state control, which would in turn have influenced warring methods.

An analysis of campaigns and wars in a wider sense is beyond the scope of this study. However, my conclusions on Greek tactics and tactical thought suggest what we might expect to find there—and the sources at first sight seem to support these suggestions. First, the vulnerability of the phalanx in open ground implies that pitched battle, far from being the only proper way to resolve conflicts, would have been seen as a gamble that a sensible commander would try his best to avoid. It was the least controllable type of engagement, and with the greatest potential for disaster. Greek awareness of the terrible risk involved is beautifully illustrated by Alkibiades' boast that he 'made the Lakedaimonians stake all they had on a single day's fighting at Mantineia' (Thuc. 6.16.6), and by the outrage of the Athenians, who, after the battle at Megara in 409, accused their generals of 'playing dice with the city at stake' (*Hell. Oxy.* 1.2). We should not be surprised, therefore, that pitched battles were rare. Campaigns described by Classical authors more commonly involved ravaging, skirmishing with light troops and cavalry, ambushes, attacks on camps and exposed settlements, and other forms of warfare usually referred to as 'irregular'.

Second, if it is right that victory in battle was considered largely pointless if a massacre did not ensue, it should follow that pitched battles could not decide wars unless very severe losses were inflicted. Without a significant death toll, defeat in battle would only serve to enrage the losing side even more. Indeed, cases of single battles resolving entire conflicts are few and far between; more often than not, city-states defeated in the field would nevertheless let the war drag on. This observation in turn suggests that the goal of war was not to obtain a symbolic admission of inferiority in battle, but to devastate the enemy's land and manpower to such an extent that they would submit to any demands. The aim of all military developments is therefore likely to have been to enhance the city-state's ability to do massive violence in order to win its wars—whether through increased spending on standing forces and mercenaries, fortification of its borders, improvement of its siege techniques, or, in Athens' case, through a two-year state-funded programme of military training for all citizens.

All this casts serious doubt on the belief that hoplite battle was the defining feature of Greek warfare, and that this made the Greeks the founders of a

'Western way of war', as Hanson famously argued in his 1989 bestseller. As we have seen, the development of Classical Greek tactical thought catered to their particular military realities and practices, the latter of which were not born out of lofty ideals but out of the pragmatic exploration of a newly emerging tactical system. In other words, their tactics are tied inextricably to their historical context. This context prescribed the avoidance of open battle, the exploitation of unfair advantage, and the infliction of crippling losses by any means. All of these features directly contradict Hanson's ideal. In terms of combined arms warfare and the management of large armies, the Greeks clearly lagged behind the Persians, who might more plausibly be identified as the founders of a military tradition that privileged the deployment of maximum force in decisive pitched battle.[5]

The military treatises of the Classical period certainly fit within this bigger picture. They do not represent the bitter lessons of a new age of warfare—a fourth-century free-for-all in which sophisticated forms of fighting had become necessary instruments to ensure the survival of city-states. Rather, they reflect a military thought that answered precisely to the realities of war from the early years of the fifth century onward. The advice of military writers does not conflict with military practice, but confirms it; their treatises offer, not a bleak vision of a new age, but a constructive effort to spread ideas that had already proven their effectiveness. The pragmatic focus of Greek tactical thought suggests that it may have been demand for such treatises that caused them to appear.[6] After all, these works served their military context—one in which victory had to be won with imperfect means, and any way to increase the chances of victory was worthy of consideration. In this sense, they were both the product and the symbol of a defining feature of the warfare of the time—the brutal pragmatism that was Greek tactics' one and only rule.

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[5] Cawkwell 2005, 103–105; Konijnendijk 2012, 7–11.

[6] Whitehead 1990, 36, 39–42.

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